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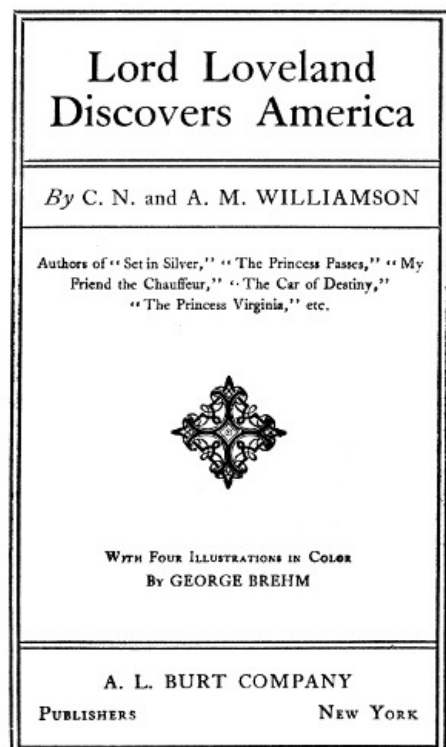
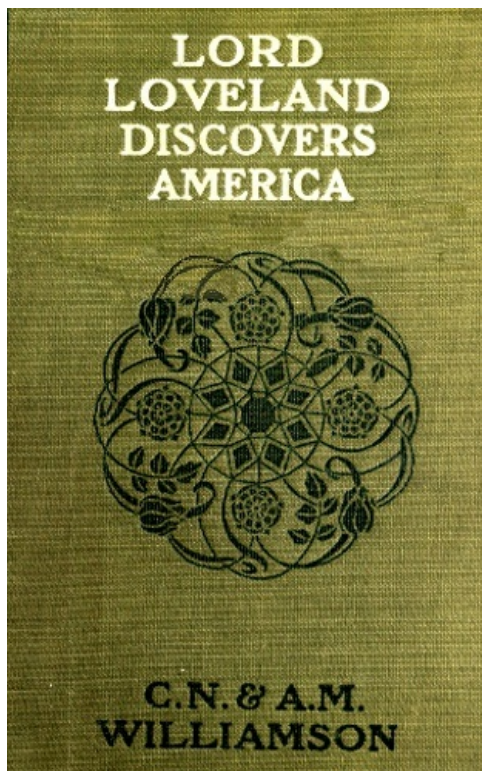
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LORD LOVELAND DISCOVERS AMERICA ***



Lord Loveland Discovers America

By C. N. and A. M. WILLIAMSON

Authors of "Set in Silver," "The Princess Passes," "My Friend the Chauffeur," "The Car of Destiny," "The Princess Virginia," etc.

WITH FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOR
By GEORGE BREHM

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TO MINDA



"... seeing his namesake's niece struggling with a wind-blown rug, he had tucked it round her feet"

CONTENTS

	PAGE
The Discovery of America by Lord Loveland	3
Between Betty and Jim	17
The Inestimable Foxham	21
Lord Loveland Makes a Start	27
The Girl in the Chair	36
Catspawing	43
Guide, Philosopher and Friend	53
Hail to the Land: Goodbye to the Girl	63
Foxham Redivivus	71
The Valley of Disappointment	79
The Discovery of Lord Loveland by America	92
Exit Lord Loveland	109
Shadows	117
A Proposition	127
Introducing Shakespeare	138
Shakespeare's Master	143
The Lights of New York	152
Izzie of the Almond Eyes	163
The Morning Paper	181
A Back Number	189
The Man Who Waits	199

News from the Great World	211
The Marquis of Twelfth Street	219
Through the Telephone	224
Alexander's Busy Day	230
Fire	235
"You're a Man"	248
A Proposal of Marriage	255
"Wanted: Juvenile Leading Man"	266
Show Folks	272
The Dignity and Delight of Being a Juvenile Lead	278
Bill's Star	291
A Mysterious Disappearance	305
Marooned	317
Pirates!	327
The Whole Truth	332
A Protégé of Miss Dearmer	349
Sidney Cremer's Chauffeur	360
In the Car Together	373
The Other Side of the Moon	383

LORD LOVELAND DISCOVERS AMERICA

CHAPTER ONE

THE DISCOVERY OF AMERICA BY LORD LOVELAND

"Even the Last Resort has refused me." Loveland broke the news to his mother when he had kissed her.

"Miss Mecklenburg?"

"Yes. I begin to realise that I'm a sinking ship. The early rats are deserting me—or declining to come on board. Clever little animals!"

"You *shan't* sink," protested Lady Loveland, clasping the pretty hands whence all save the wedding ring and its guard had gone to pay a visit of indefinite length to Messrs. Battenborough. "The idiot, to refuse you—with her *nose*, too."

"She didn't do it with her nose, Mater."

"Val, you know what I mean. And after you'd overlooked her being a Jewess!"

"Yes, it was kind of me, wasn't it? An Italian Prince has just overlooked it, too. Her engagement to Doriana was announced the morning after she'd offered to be a sister to me. It was the size of her purse, not her nose, which caught his eye. But sooner or later he'll beat her."

"I hope so. She deserves it for taking him instead of you. Oh, Val, what a world!"

"Don't grouse, Mater. *I* might have beaten her if I'd got her, and then there'd have been a scandal. I can't stand women with important looking teeth, and noses which throw their other features into perspective. Besides, Lillah Mecklenburg isn't as young as she's painted."

"So few women are nowadays, dearest," sighed Lady Loveland, who, in living for her handsome son, did not trouble to live up to the past of her complexion, and whose way of doing her hair was alone enough to show that though lenient to Val's weaknesses, she would not condone those of her sister women. "Oh, Val, it's hard you should have to think of such creatures. But what are we to do?"

"That's just where I want your advice," said Loveland, who had come a long way to get it. For the distance from London to the north of Scotland is formidable when birds are out of season.

Lady Loveland was flattered that Val should ask for her advice which, when offered gratuitously, he had never been known to take.

"My advice!" she echoed sadly. "That's all I can give you now! Although I did hope, dear Boy, I must confess. I—I have been trying for Limericks. It was for your sake, and I hoped to win large sums. I thought of lines all night long, and I did send in some splendid ones, a thousand times better than those for which other people (dreadful people, my dear, with names like Hogson, and Dobbs) have won hundreds of pounds. I gave the editors permission to *use my name*, too; one

would have thought, a valuable advertisement for their papers. But all I've won after the greatest efforts has been fifteen and six—an insult—while these Dobbs and Hogsons—I believe the editors must be *Socialists*. And—the shillings for the postal orders have counted up into pounds. I am crushed with remorse."

"Never mind, dear, you meant it for the best," said Val, who cared more for his mother than for anyone else in the world—except himself. And that he made this exception was largely Lady Loveland's fault, for she had brought him up to believe in but one person of paramount importance, adorning the universe: Perceval George Victor Edward Gordon, thirteenth Marquis of Loveland. "What would a few pounds matter—or a few hundreds even, if you'd won them? The ship's too far under water to be raised with Limericks."

"Dearest—is it as bad as that?"

"It's as bad as anything can be. Look out of your window at the snow falling. Well, that's nothing to the way it's snowing bills outside my window. If you and I can't think of something to clear the weather, I shall have to chuck the army. And even if I do, the bills will still keep on snowing."

"What horrible creatures tradesmen must be," said Lady Loveland, whose opinions had come down to her crusted and spider-webbed from the cellars of the Stone Age. "To think that we'd have had power of life and death over them if we'd lived a few hundred years ago. I wish those times could come back."

"The world at large doesn't agree with you."

"It oughtn't to be at large," replied Lady Loveland, without the smallest idea of a joke. "It's reached a pretty pass when Worms who make boots and uniforms and——"

"And sell wine——"

"Oh, if you like——"

"And jewellery——"

"Very well. Admit the jewellery——"

"And motors. I've wasted a good deal of substance in riotous motor-cars, Mater."

"Oh, I suppose men of your position have some right to enjoy their lives? As I was saying, it's come to a pretty pass when Worms who make or sell what every gentleman *must* have—things that ought simply to come, like the air you breathe—can turn and rend an officer of the Guards, a peer of the realm, without fear of being crushed."

"If I'd chosen to be a kind of secret advertising agent for tradespeople, I might have been dressed and wined for nothing, motor-carred too, perhaps," said Loveland. "I know some fellows who do go in for that sort of thing. But I'm hanged if I could. I'd rather blow out my brains decently."

"Oh, my darling, don't speak so wildly," implored his mother. "There must be resources we can call upon—if we could only think of them."

"I have called on several people's resources, without any good coming of it." Loveland grinned faintly, though he was in the depths of depression, and had suffered from insomnia for at least a week, between eight and ten in the morning, when so popular a young man should (in his own opinion) have been dreaming of last night's pleasures, instead of worrying how to pay for them.

"There is surely a last resort," went on Lady Loveland.

"Miss Mecklenburg was mine—and she's failed me—thank Heaven!"

"There must be something else."

"Something still worse?"

"Don't be flippant, dearest. I can't concentrate my thoughts when you are. Ah, if we could have let Loveland Castle as well as we did twelve years ago!"

"It's crumbled a lot since. And we're too poor to repair ourselves, let alone our castles."

"You at least don't need repairing," said his mother, gazing at her son with admiration. "You're the handsomest young man in the Kingdom."

Loveland laughed, though he believed her. As a child he had been kissed by all his mother's prettiest friends, because he was so absurdly beautiful, and so precocious. If he had been a plain or stupid boy he might have grown up to be an estimable young man, as Marquises go. "Why don't you say, 'in the world?'" he asked.

"I'm not a woman to *exaggerate*, dearest. All the Lovelands have been good-looking. One has only to go into the picture gallery at the Castle to see that——"

"Yes. As we can't sell their portraits."

"If we could, your father would have done it when he sold the Town house. But you will be so confusing, Val. My argument is, that as you're the best looking and the cleverest——"

"I don't know a blessed thing, my dear ladyship. Never had any education. You ought to have sent me to Eton, instead of coddling me up with tutors and—"

"You didn't think so then. I remember well when it was proposed, you flung yourself on the floor and howled."

"So of course that settled it."

"Why, yes. You generally settled things like that. You had such a determined way, dear. But you were *born* knowing more than many studious, uninteresting young men have forgotten. Then, your South African career! It was like a romance. You, who had been crammed, oh, ever so little, for Sandhurst, and then left there to go to the war when you were a mere child, hardly nineteen—so brave! And then, the Thing you did on the battlefield! Of course you ought to have had the Victoria Cross, but as it was, the newspapers rang with your praises, and I was besieged for your photographs to publish. That deed alone would have made you a personage of consideration, even without your rank."

"I've told you lots of times, Mater, the whole thing was a sort of accident. I couldn't bear the chap. If I'd stopped to think, I don't believe I'd have run back a step to drag him out from under fire. But I was there, hauling him away, before I knew what I was doing."

"Yes, you have told me—and other people. But no one believes you. How could they? They see it's your modesty." (Lord Loveland's mother was perhaps the one person on earth who would have attributed to him this quality.) "And as for disliking the young man whose life you saved at the risk of your own, of course that proves you all the more noble. Everybody must see that."

"Oh, well, it's a jolly good thing for me if they do," said Val, mechanically passing his hand over the scar on his forehead, which became him like a hall mark or a halo. It, together with the South African brown that never quite faded, had made him still more ornamental in the eyes of the pretty young married women with whom he was popular. Also in the eyes of girls, who liked to dance and flirt with Lord Loveland, even though they preferred to marry Dukes and Princes. "But what are you working up to so elaborately, Mater?"

"To your Prospects. There's no young man so liked and wanted everywhere."

"Oh, I'm fair at polo: I can ride straight, and shoot a bit," said Loveland with a pretence at self-depreciation he was far from feeling. "I get asked to all the amusing house parties. But you know as well as I do, that stopping at such places is a lot more expensive than swaggering about at the most expensive hotels in Europe."

"I know, dearest," sighed the devoted lady who by industrious spoiling had made him what he was. "I was only going on to say that you *are* a personage of importance; never think you're not. As for the two or three wretched girls who have hurled themselves at the heads of princes, when they might have had you—why, our English heiresses are growing disgustingly conceited and ambitious, quite unmaidenly, and let *them* regret their mistakes—you needn't. Val, you want my advice. Well, I've had an inspiration, I do believe, a real inspiration. *Why don't you go to America?*"

"To try ranching?"

"Good Heavens, no, my son! To try marrying. In America you'll succeed brilliantly. Why not run over and see what there is?"

She spoke as if to see meant to have, notwithstanding certain failures nearer home. But Loveland's sense of humour, which had a real existence, did not always bestir itself when his own affairs were in question. When things come too close to the eye, one is apt to lose the point of view. And Loveland did not laugh at his mother's suggestion.

"Oh, girls!" he said, distastefully. "Why go there for them? Plenty come over here to collect us."

"Ye—es. But think of the competition. There are still unmarried Dukes. It's so annoying, there always seem to be Dukes, and foreign semi-Royalties who might better stop in their own countries than prowl about ours, seeking what they may devour."

"That's what you propose my doing in the States."

"Oh, that's different. The Americans would be the foreigners, not you."

"They don't look on themselves in that light."

"Let them look at you—the girls I mean—in *any* light, there, on their native heath, where practically no competition can exist. For who ever heard of an American heiress marrying an American man?"

"I suppose it must happen sometimes," said Val.

"It's never in the newspapers. No, dearest, I believe that is why, according to statistics, there are so many more men than women in the States. The girls marry our men. And really some of them are quite presentable."

If any one of three or four beautiful and charming Duchesses had heard the tone in which old Lady Loveland said this, she would have laughed or sneered, according to her mood.

"Do you know many Americans, Val?" his mother went on, thoughtfully.

"Hardly any except Jim Harborough, and—er—his cousin who has married Stanforth."

(This was another instance of a misguided young woman who preferred a Duke to the Marquis. Therefore she remained nameless between mother and son.)

"Mr. Harborough would, I suppose, give you letters of introduction to the Right People over there?"

"Oh, yes, I suppose he would. He doesn't approve of me; but he couldn't refuse letters to his wife's cousin."

"Doesn't approve of you, indeed! What impertinence! But perhaps he's jealous, and thinks you were once in love with Betty. I feared it myself before she paid that visit to the States which turned out such a success. Just as I'm sure yours would, if you went."

"I never was in love with Betty. First cousins are a bit too near to be interesting. One's generally known them since the stage when they were silly over dolls. Besides, Betty looks too much like me. I don't care for yellow-haired, blue-eyed girls."

"It's just as well you didn't care for Betty. Such a marriage would have been disastrous. But she's a sweet girl, and must have made a good many friends in the States. There was the young woman Mohunsleigh married, for instance. I believe he met her through Betty. Oh, Val, you really *ought* to go over. I'm sure you'd be the greatest success."

"Perhaps it wouldn't be a bad idea," Loveland patronized his mother's inspiration. "Of course Harborough and Betty would both give me letters. If I had to marry—horrid bore, at my age!—and could afford to choose, I'd take an English girl of the right sort. But Americans are a lot better than English ones of the wrong sort; middle class mushrooms who've shot up in a night—on the strength of Pale Pills for Pink People, or Corsets, or Disinfectants. If a man's a beggar he must be content with the wine and wives of the country where he begs. American girls, no matter what they've sprung from, seem adaptable; and anyhow, people are tolerant of any queer ways they may have."

"That's true," agreed Lady Loveland, who had never in her life spoken to an American girl, but was now eager to become Dowager for the sake of a desirable one. "If you went to New York—or somewhere—you'd see enough girls to feel you were picking out the best. Oh, you would virtually have a clear coast! And judging from novels I've read, everybody in American society would be fighting for the honour of entertaining you, racking their brains to get up the most wonderful spectacles for your amusement."

"They wouldn't amuse me," said Loveland, in the *blasé* way he had cultivated since he came back a wounded hero of nineteen, in the last year of the South African war. "I should be there purely on business." But though he spoke like a tired man of forty rather than a happy and healthy one of twenty-six or seven, he was beginning to lean towards his mother's advice. He could easily get long leave. He had a couple of months due to him. During a tour of inspection in the States he would be free from all the bills that flesh is heir to, as he would have no settled address, until the "business" that took him over was settled. After that, when his engagement was published in the papers, tradesmen would hold their hands.

"It oughtn't to take you many weeks," Lady Loveland was reflecting aloud, "if you went at the right season, and to the right place."

"The Season is different for different places over there, Betty says," remarked Loveland, who now, having discovered America as a spot worthy of note on the world's map, was ready to explain it to his mother.

"How odd!" exclaimed Lady Loveland, to whom all things were odd, and scarcely proper, if they were not as in Great Britain. "But oh, of course, you only mean that they go to one place to shoot at a certain time, to another to hunt at a different time, as We do——"

"Not exactly that, I think," said Val, getting out of his element. "I believe it's something to do with the thermometer. Betty went in summer, and was obliged to stop at Newport. One reads things about Newport."

"Yes. Though I forget what," replied his mother, dismissing Newport. "But in the States there must be heiresses abounding in great quantities everywhere, as all American girls appear to be rich in more or less degrees. They flock to Europe from towns with the most extraordinary names. I don't know why it's happened to stick in my memory, but I know there was one—Oshkosh, or something truly awful of that sort. A young person from there, with millions, actually millions, married the Marquise de Merpoule's third son, if you remember, a most unprepossessing youth, whose face looked like an *accident*."

"I hardly think I should have to go as far afield as Oshkosh, wherever it may be," said Loveland, glancing at his double in the mirror—where was reflected also the worn furnishing of his mother's drawing-room. With a pang he saw the sorry background and forgot himself for a moment in thinking of Loveland Castle—a very noble, dull palace, all marble, gold plate, portraits and precedence when in its prime; echoing sadness now, until such time as the heir might redeem it with some fair lady's dollars. The murmur of those echoes depressed him, as did the

white whirl of snow veiling the windows of the shooting lodge whither Lady Loveland had retired to live upon nothing, that he might have something.

But his mother was happy in prophetic thoughts of a future, when Val should have saved his own and the family's fortunes. "Of course you won't need to go to Oshkosh," she said. "Very likely they'd have small-pox or Red Indians there. I only meant that if there could be millions in a town with such a name, what must there be in others more important and easier to get at?"

"I'll stick to the important ones that are easy to get at."

"That means you are making up your mind to go?"

"It's practically made up—thanks to you, Mater. I believe in quick decisions."

"How like your father! After selling the house in Grosvenor Square, he made up his mind in ten minutes to go to Monte Carlo, and—"

"Don't compare that decision with this, for Heaven's sake. It wouldn't be lucky."

"No, dearest," said Lady Loveland meekly, her delicate nose reddening with reminiscences. "Well then, it's quite settled. I feel it's for the best. And I can trust you to bring me a daughter-in-law to be—well, not to be *ashamed* of."

"I'll promise you anyhow she shan't disgrace you by her manners, or me by her looks, after I've gone so far to get her."

"Why, you might find something that would do, on the ship, which would save so much time and trouble!" exclaimed Lady Loveland, brightening. "You could marry immediately on landing. And yet—perhaps it would be foolish to do anything irrevocable until you'd looked to see what there was in New York. You mustn't be reckless when so much depends upon prudence. Still it would be wise to sail on a good ship, where you might meet millionairesses. That would be only an ordinary precaution."

"It wouldn't be an ordinary price," said Loveland.

"We must manage it somehow—and a good cabin. You owe that to your position."

"I owe so much already, I may as well owe a little more."

"Val, dear, I asked you not to joke. It confuses me. And I need to concentrate all my ideas upon one point. Let me see. Yes! *The pink pearls!*"

"The pink what?" asked Loveland, startled.

"I still have them. The double rope, you know."

"I know. Another beastly heirloom."

"Still, one can pawn heirlooms. Your bride can redeem it—and the other things. I've always saved the pink pearls for a great emergency. This *is* a great emergency. Battenborough ought to give seven or eight hundred. And though seven or eight hundred, as you say, wouldn't go far among the debts, they might send you to America and back."

"I'll have to throw a few sops to Cerberus, if I want new clothes to impress the American girls," laughed Val. "That brute Deedes won't give me so much as a waistcoat unless he gets something on account."

"Pay him something," said Lady Loveland. "Pay what you must. Keep what you can—for yourself. As for me, I want nothing."

"Except a rich daughter-in-law," finished her son, his spirits rising though the snow still fell. After all, it was only October, and there was sunshine elsewhere. In America perhaps it was now shining on his bride to be! "I'll write to Betty about the letters," he said, "after you've given me some tea."

CHAPTER TWO

BETWEEN BETTY AND JIM

One of Loveland's most easily detected virtues was his careless habit of telling the truth. He had never lied, or even fibbed whitely, as a small boy, an idiosyncrasy which had often seriously inconvenienced his mother and other relations whose pet failings or economies he had ruthlessly exposed. But Lady Betty Bulkeley had always maintained that this bold truthfulness of her cousin's was the result of inconsiderateness rather than nobility of soul.

She said (and she ought to have known, as she had been acquainted with him since she was two, and he eight, years old) that he did not bother to think of polite fibs, simply because the feelings of others were not for him of enough importance to seem worth saving at the cost of mental effort. Besides, according to Betty, Val took an impish delight in shocking people. As for blurting

out the truth about his own affairs, the habit sprang from that impishness, in idle moods, and a sublime indifference to public opinion in serious states of mind. Now, in his letter to Betty asking for introductions, he made no attempt to cover his real intentions with the roses of pretty fiction.

He let it appear plainly that he thought his cousin, having visited America and snatched a millionaire from the matrimonial grab-bag, ought gladly to help him succeed in the same game.

"The wretch!" said Betty, in the midst of reading Loveland's brutally frank letter to Jim, her American trophy, "I believe he has the impudence to think I married you for money! I'd like to shake him, and box his silly, conceited ears."

"They may be silly and conceited, but they're exactly the shape of yours, darling, so I couldn't find it in my heart to box them, no matter how much good it might do their owner," said Jim Harborough, who had been Betty's husband for nearly a year, and was joyously watching her triumphs as a young married woman.

Naturally Betty kissed him for this speech, as they were at breakfast alone together, the servants banished.

"Well, anyway, we won't give him the letters," she said when she had gone back to her own place—not far away.

"Won't we?" asked Jim, with a thoughtful air.

"No, certainly not," returned Betty. "I like your country-women, and I won't deliberately let Loveland loose to prey upon them."

"I 'guess' they can take care of themselves," said Jim, putting on his Yankiest accent.

"I don't know. Some of them might fall in love with him," suggested Betty doubtfully. "He's awfully good-looking, with a kind of winning, boyish way, and—a voice that's far too nice to express him, really. One often feels too lenient with Val, as if he were one of one's own pet weaknesses come alive and walking about."

"As for his looks, he's more like you than your own brother is," said Jim, "eyes, dimples, curly hair and all; so you wouldn't want me to hate him, would you? And as for his voice, it's occurred to me that maybe it expresses something in his *real* self—the hidden self that he and nobody else knows anything about—the self he's never had a chance to develop or find out, because his mother and other people have spoiled him from his babyhood."

"That's very subtle of you, Jim, as well as very kind—and like you," said Betty. "I wish I could think it's true, as he's my cousin. But thank goodness, I for one never spoiled him. I scratched his face once when I was a small girl, and I'm glad. I wish it had left a mark."

"It would have been even a more honourable scar than the one South Africa gave him. But I admit, he is rather an unlicked cub,—at present. I pity the girl who falls in love with him—as he now is."

"Always was and probably ever will be, Loveland without end," finished Betty, flippantly. "The *cheek* of him, expecting me to ask you for letters, so that he can go over to your country and do his best to make some nice American girl miserable for life—and spend all her money. I shall punish him—since I can't do anything worse—by telling him exactly what I think of him."

"There are other ways of punishing him—more fitting to the crime, perhaps," remarked Jim, thoughtfully.

"What ways?"

"Giving him the letters."

"Jim!"

"And then—and then—well, a lot depends upon whether he's a *born* egoist, or merely a made one. I haven't quite worked out the idea yet. It's simmering—it'll soon begin to boil."

Whether Jim Harborough's idea had already boiled or not, at all events that same afternoon a fat envelope went out by post, registered, and addressed to The Marquis of Loveland, Cragside Lodge, Dorloch, N. B. In it there were at least ten letters of introduction, all to names the bare mention of which had power to raise the circulation of Society papers in America, or create a flutter in Wall Street. Each envelope enclosed in the big one was left open, so that Loveland might acquaint himself with the terms in which his cousins described him to their millionaire friends.

Perhaps he was slightly aggrieved that they did not paint him in more glowing terms, or dwell upon the honour conferred on the recipients of the letters. But there was no real fault to find, and—as Jim would perhaps have said—it was "up" to Loveland to make his own impression. On the whole, Val was satisfied with what he had got, and condescendingly wrote two lines of thanks to Betty.

CHAPTER THREE

THE INESTIMABLE FOXHAM

Times were bad, said Battenborough, the polite and popular pawnbroker; therefore Lady Loveland got only six hundred pounds on the pink pearls. Two hundred were sprinkled about among Val's creditors, like pepper out of a pot, where such seasoning was necessary. A hundred more were spent outright, with heartburnings, upon obstinate tailors, hatters and hosiers, who would not tail, hat nor hose, except upon instalments of ready money. Fifty pounds were apologetically retained by Lady Loveland, who grudged every penny to herself and especially to her servants. Another fifty a little more than paid for a cabin almost worthy of his lordship on the big ship *Baltic*. Fifty and some vague dust of gold and silver went into Val's pocket for current expenses; and the remaining hundred and fifty condensed into the form of a letter of credit.

Of course there ought to have been more, much more. But there would have been less had not Loveland's man, Foxham, given notice at the last moment. This inestimable person assured his master that nothing but the most urgent necessity could have induced him to take such a course. He suffered poignantly, Foxham intimated with proper respect, in the idea that another must perform for his lordship those services which had been his pleasure and duty; but Foxham's grandfather had died (even valets have grandfathers) leaving a tidy sum; and as there were peculiarities in the will, Foxham would lose his chance of inheriting if he left England.

Loveland privately thought it almost equivalent to *lèse majesté* that his man should desert him for such a selfish trifle as private interest. But he would have scorned to retain a servant who wished to leave him; besides, there were advantages in losing even such a treasure as Foxham before the two passages were taken.

Val had learned from a friend that, if you sent your valet second class, you were not able to command his services on shipboard. This seemed a disgusting waste of money, and ought to be protested against in *The Times*, or somewhere. On the other hand, he could not afford a first-class fare for Foxham.

"I dare say I can get some fellow over there, if everything goes well," said he. "Meanwhile I shall save money on old Fox. He hasn't opened his mouth about wages. Jolly impudent if he had, because of course he knows I'll pay up when its convenient. And anyhow, a hundred and fifty in the letter of credit is the least I can rub along with, on the other side. I must 'look sharp' as Harborough says, and pick up the right girl, so as to get everything in shape as soon as possible, or I may find myself in a mess."

"Don't imagine anything so horrid, darling," said Lady Loveland, anxious to prop up her son's spirits as well as his credit. "Think only of the best. But I'm sorry about Foxham. He turns you out so perfectly."

"Oh, I learned to shift for myself like a regular navy in South Africa," Loveland consoled her. "A chap has to keep clean and have the right folds in his trousers, whatever happens; and I worried along somehow without disgracing the family. I can do the same now, though it'll be a bore, especially till I get used to it again."

Thus the pink pearl money was apportioned, a little here and a little there, and made to go as far as possible.

Foxham stopped with his lordship till after the return to London, doing the final packing, and all his ordinary work as usual, without a greedy word as to arrears of wages. Perhaps this was due to an angelic disposition; or perhaps he guessed the motive of his master's errand, and was willing to speculate on the result. But Loveland took the man's devotion for granted, without going too deeply into causes.

On getting back to his quarters near Wellington Barracks, Val was somewhat surprised to receive a visit from Harborough, who had never come to call on him before.

"So you've got your leave, I hear, and are sailing for my blessed country in a few days," Jim remarked.

Loveland replied that this was the case, and happened to think of thanking Jim for his letters of introduction.

Harborough answered casually that that was all right; and went on to say that he had read in a paper, or heard from a man, that Loveland had taken his passage on the *Baltic*.

"Yes," said Val. "I wanted to go over on a good ship."

"Well, the *Baltic's* a ripping one—couldn't be a better," Jim admitted. "But I should have thought you'd have the curiosity to try the newest thing."

"The *Mauretania*?" said Loveland. "Don't suppose I could have got a passage on her for the next three or four trips across."

"Perhaps *you* couldn't," said Jim. "But I can get you one."

"Why, she sails tomorrow, doesn't she?" asked Val.

"Yes," said Jim, "but you can go on her if you like, with a good cabin too, all to yourself."

"My passage is paid for on the *Baltic*, and my name's on her passenger list," said Loveland.

"Well, it's too late to have your name printed on the *Mauretania's* passenger list, or perhaps to get back your money for the *Baltic*," said Jim, "but that needn't stand in your way. You won't have to pay for your cabin on the *Mauretania*. It's going begging. A friend of mine who can't sail has given his ticket to me, to do with as I like; but as he's a man whose movements make things in Wall Street jump up and down like a see-saw, he doesn't want it known that he's got to stay behind because he's seedy. That's all. If you want to go in his place, go, and say nothing till you get on the other side. By that time he'll be on his way, on a following ship. At least, that's what he hopes."

"Do you mean, that if I want to cross in the *Mauretania*, I must pass under your friend's name?" asked Loveland, beginning to look haughty; for though he was tempted by the offer, he did not think that another man's name was worthy of his wearing even for five days. He would as willingly have appeared in Bond Street in a second-hand, ready-made coat.

"Oh no, nothing of the sort," answered Jim Harborough, smiling his pleasant smile. "What I meant was, don't go advertising the fact that you've got Henry VanderPot's cabin because he's not well enough to sail. All you'll have to do is to swagger about as if you'd meant to be a passenger on the *Mauretania* from the beginning of things."

Loveland was prepared to do any amount of swaggering, though he did not say so to Jim, or indeed acknowledge it to himself. He replied that, if this were the only condition, he would accept the ticket, and instruct Foxham (as he would not have time himself) to try and sell the passage which he had paid for on the *Baltic*.

"Fox'll have several days to do it in, and I'll tell him if he brings it off, there's ten per cent for himself," said Val. "Meanwhile I'll be enjoying myself on the *Mauretania*."

"Meanwhile you'll be enjoying yourself on the *Mauretania*," echoed Jim.

"I suppose there are sure to be a lot of millionaires on board?" suggested Val.

"Sure to be, even at this time of year."

"With pretty daughters?" Loveland's tone and air in making this addition were so conceited that Jim would have wanted to kick him if he had not looked so ridiculously like Jim's own adored and beautiful Betty. Besides, the scar showed white on the brown. This had been a brave boy. Jim was inclined to believe that he was worth reforming.

"With pretty daughters," Harborough repeated, his tone quiet though his eyes showed a danger signal. "However, be prudent. Don't make up your mind too soon. The best fish aren't always caught in the deep sea. One waits to have a look round the markets."

Loveland grinned. "Thank you for the tip. I won't forget."

"Not likely that you'll hold yourself too cheap, eh?" Jim could not resist that one dig, in spite of the scar, and Betty's laugh in the blue eyes between their black fringes.

But Val did not see the joke, as he assuredly would if it had been aimed at anybody else. Jim having married into the family, ought to uphold the family pride, and Loveland doubted not that he did.

"Rather not," he returned patronizingly. "You needn't be afraid, my dear chap. Very kind of you to think of me for this cabin. And though it's a bit short notice, that can't be helped. Foxham will get me off somehow."

"You'll hardly have time to let people know your change of plan," said Jim. "But of course if you don't mind a little expense you can Marconi to Lady Loveland from the ship."

"Of course," assented Lady Loveland's son, who would not have thought of the attention had it not been suggested to him. "But it will hardly be necessary."

"Perhaps not," said Jim.

CHAPTER FOUR

LORD LOVELAND MAKES A START

Loveland's only experience of sea life, except for a little yachting, had been in going out to, and returning from, South Africa; but he had learned to take care of himself on shipboard, and though his name was not on the passenger list of the *Mauretania*, his deck chair was soon placed by an attentive steward in a sheltered corner nearly amidship. This advantage was secured by a tempting tip, a tip out of all proportion to the giver's resources: but then, there were many people on the *Mauretania* who came on board more like clients returning to a hotel where they had been known by the management for years, than passengers travelling on a new ship; and Loveland did

not intend to be defeated in an unequal competition. He wanted the best of everything on this trip, and felt that money would be well spent in obtaining it. He always did feel this when he had any money—or credit—to spend.

Possibly he might have economized coin by parading his title, but though spoiled and conceited he was also a gentleman, and while he might trade upon his position for the matrimonial market, would not flaunt it gratuitously. He considered he would be giving value for value: taking a girl's dollars and making her a Marchioness: but he thought too much of himself to "put on side."

When the deck-steward politely asked if he wished to use a visiting card as a chair-marker, Val told him to write the name of Loveland on a slip of paper or a luggage label; anything would do. So the steward did as he was bidden, ignorant that he served a "lord."

Loveland did not feel that he needed cheap advertisement. It would soon leak out that he was a personage, and, sure enough, it did. When he had discreetly explained to the purser his possession of Mr. VanderPot's cabin, the news of the change went round from steward to steward, and was promptly "spotted" as a tit-bit by the greatest gossip on the ship, who happened to inhabit the stateroom opposite.

Major Cadwallader Hunter (a retired major, of course; he would not have had time to develop his qualities while on the active list) was told that he had Loveland for a neighbour, and looked at the cabin door with kindling interest. Being himself, he had studied the passenger list, as a collector of antiques is wont to study the announcements of sales. He could have rattled off by heart all the names worth rattling, and he was certain that Lord Loveland's had not been among them.

Major Cadwallader Hunter was an American of a type laughed at by the best of his own countrymen. He knew his Burke and Debrett better than many an Englishman even of that middle class which can afford to be ignorant of no detail concerning the aristocracy. He was aware that there existed a Marquis of Loveland who was young and unmarried; he knew all about his family connections, and he wondered how such an important gentleman had strayed on board the *Mauretania* unheralded. "I suppose this fellow must be *the* Loveland, of course," he said to himself. "But why not be published frankly on the passenger list? Can there be a secret?"

At this moment Loveland walked out from his stateroom, having come below for pipe and tobacco-pouch. He caught Major Cadwallader Hunter staring at his door, and gave him a brief yet supercilious glance. To some men it would have seemed an offensive glance, but Major Cadwallader Hunter was not to be easily offended by a man he wished to know. He disappeared into his own cabin, by way of proving that he was a neighbour, not a Paul Pry; but a few minutes later he was on deck, ambling amiably from one group of acquaintances to another, and dexterously avoiding detrimentals.

Cadwallader Hunter aspired to be a leader of society. He was one of those strange beings—heraldic, rampant, disregardant—who are born snobs, in spite of good birth and good breeding. Therefore he was not a genuine article (since no snob can be genuine) but had moulded himself into a thing of airs and affectations. Nevertheless he managed to impress most second-rate people, and some who were first-rate. Those who did not live in New York believed him to be of consequence in that city, and the *Paris Herald* always reported his comings and goings. He was a thin, well-groomed man, of middle age, with a heart-hiding smile, a high nose and a high voice; gold-rimmed eyeglasses giving glitter to pale, cold eyes; a waxed moustache; a carefully cultivated "English accent," and a marvellous fund of scandalous anecdotes concerning everyone about whom it was worth while to be scandalous. He had at least a bowing acquaintance with all the richest Americans on board, and he mixed with his greetings here and there a careless "Do you know we have Lord Loveland on the ship—the Marquis of Loveland? Such a good-looking young man. One of the oldest and most distinguished peerages in England; family of soldiers since the dark ages, though the less said about some of them since the days of the Georges the better. This boy not so bad as some of the old boys before him. Not to be despised by *débutantes*, eh? Do I know him?—"

(As a matter of fact, Cadwallader Hunter could count his acquaintances in the British peerage on the fingers of one hand, and have a thumb to spare; for it is the genuine, unaffected, typical Americans, or else the heavily gilded and diamond-incrusted ones whom English people like to know. But this question was bound to come. He had led up to it, and was prepared.)

"Do I know him? Why, in a way we're connections by marriage. You must remember pretty Lady Betty Bulkeley who took us all by storm a year or two ago—sister of the Duke of Stanforth? Jimmy Harborough, whom she married, is I believe a forty-second cousin of mine: and Lady Betty and Lord Loveland are related. So you see—"

And for fear that they should see—something that he did not wish them to see—he pattered away to "get at" Loveland before anyone could possibly have the chance to find out that they two were strangers.

Meanwhile Loveland had not been wasting time.

He thought that Jim Harborough's hint about "deep sea fish" was a wise one, wiser than he would have expected from Harborough. Still, there was no harm in keeping his eyes open; and having kept them open from the first moment after coming on board, he had discovered several very pretty girls. With a certain amount of eagerness, rather as one looks at one's cards when beginning a new rubber of bridge, he glanced over the passenger-list, hoping that some of the

names might be identical with those on his letters of introduction. But there were no such coincidences, and he, unluckily, was too ignorant of American society to know which of his fellow passengers were most important. However, he made up his mind that one of the first things to do, was to find out.

Sure of his chair, on which the name of "Loveland" already appeared in the steward's handwriting, he paced up and down and all round the deck, pipe in mouth and hands in pockets. It was a November day, of Indian summer warmth. The huge ship felt no impulse from the waves which fawned upon her sides, and Loveland, who had been bored by the necessity to leave his native land, began suddenly to feel happy, quite boyishly happy.

A great many other people were parading up and down also; pretty girls, walking alone, or with parents, or accompanied by youths with whom they intended to flirt during the voyage. Shrewd-faced men, with eyes good-natured yet keen, and an air of solid importance which might mean millions; handsome, prosperous-looking women whom Loveland guessed to be Newport and New York hostesses pleased to welcome prowling Marquesses; and besides these, numbers of vague persons whom to meet once was to forget twice.

After half an hour's walk, Val had selected two girls from the "rosebud garden" which, he felt, bloomed for his benefit in this mammoth, floating flower-bed. There were so many attractive ones, that it was difficult to choose, yet Val did not doubt that he had weeded out the best; and he hoped that, of the pair, one might be the principal unmarried millionairess of the *Mauretania*.

There could hardly have been a greater contrast between girls than between these two whom Lord Loveland had mentally set apart for himself, as a man picks out the most becoming neckties from a box on a shop counter.

One, who walked the deck with an elderly man whose likeness of feature proclaimed him her father, was very tall, almost as tall as Loveland, who could be a six-footer when he took the trouble not to slouch. She was slender in all the right places, and rounded in all the right places, her waist being so slim that she seemed held together only by a spine and a lady-like ligament or two; which means faultlessness of figure according to fashion-plate standards. She had burnished auburn hair, and magnificent yellow-grey eyes rimmed with dark lashes. Her nose was aquiline, her mouth red and drooping at the corners, a combination which made her profile closely resemble a famous photograph of the Empress Eugenie in the prime of loveliness.

A number of the nicest looking people who came and went on deck seemed glad to claim acquaintance with this girl and her handsome father; but though they were warmly greeted again and again, the girl maintained a cool dignity not unworthy of Betty Bulkeley's mother, the Duchess of Stanforth.

Val said to himself that the Mater would be pleased with a daughter-in-law of this type, and that such a girl would never make her husband ashamed. He could not imagine falling in love with her hard brilliance; but then he wasn't going to America to fall in love. His intentions were strictly businesslike. And this girl was bound to be admired everywhere. She would look an ideal hostess, entertaining house parties at Loveland Castle, when her money had restored it to all and more than its ancient splendour.

Loveland's second choice might have been his first, for some reasons, and in fact she was his first by impulse; only she did not look as obviously an heiress as the other. Neither was she so obviously a beauty; yet her charm leaped at the beholder with the briefest glance, especially if that beholder were a man; leaped at him through his eyes, and thrillingly through his nerves, in a mysterious, indescribable, curiously interesting way.

She was not very tall, and she was a slim slip of a creature, not in the least like a fashion plate, but suggestive of soft natural curves, even in her navy-blue tailor-made frock.

If she had been stage-struck, and had asked for a chance in the chorus, a theatrical manager would have found himself giving it to her, he hardly knew why, more because she said she wanted it than on the strength of her voice, or form, or features. Then, having yielded so far to her magnetism, he would have said to himself, "She isn't striking enough for the front row, or even the second. She must go into the third." And there she would have gone docilely. Yet the critics and all other men with eyes would have picked her out; and presently she would have been more noticed than the beauties in the front row. By and by, when there arose a little part with a few lines to speak, she would have got it; and at last, in some way or other, it would have been she who was making the "hit of the piece."

Lord Loveland did not say anything of this sort to himself, but he felt a faint electric shock of interest every time they passed and repassed each other; though after the first she did not look at him, with the big brown eyes that surely had the prettiest, most bewitching lashes ever seen.

Really, they were charming eyes. If nothing else were actually beautiful about the girl, her eyes undoubtedly were exquisite. They were very soft, and no man could look into them even for half a second in passing without realizing deliciously that they were a woman's eyes; yet they were not coquettish, except for that piquant effect of the curled lashes. They were full of sympathy and intelligence, and gazed frankly, sweetly out at the world, as if they could understand, and laugh or cry at things which other, commonplace eyes would never even see.

For the rest, she had the clear, colourless skin which shows every change of emotion, a sensitive

mouth, not too small for generosity; in the firm little chin, a cleft which meant a keen sense of humour; and a slightly impertinent nose which might mean anything or nothing.

Loveland felt that it would be interesting to know this girl, even if she were not an heiress, but he hoped that she might prove to be one, because it would be hard to learn the wisdom of ceasing to know her if she turned out as poor as himself.

The difficulty in judging these American girls, Val began to think as he watched the charming review, was that they all looked like millionairesses. They walked as if they were so used to being young persons of importance, that they graciously waived the fact of their own greatness: which means, that they had the air of goddesses, or princesses at the least. They were all dressed perfectly, and groomed perfectly. Their frocks fitted perfectly, and every detail of their toilets was perfect, from the buttons of their English gloves to the toes of their American boots. So how was a man to judge which were *the* ones, and which the other ones?

Val made up his mind at last that he would walk no more, but would sit down and think this question over. Besides, for some moments the enchanting girl in the navy-blue frock had ceased to flit to and fro. Therefore he went towards the sheltered corner where he knew his deck chair was waiting for him, and to his extreme surprise found her comfortably installed in it.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE GIRL IN THE CHAIR

For a moment Loveland was more conceited than he had ever been in his life,—which is saying not a little. He told himself that the girl must have found out who he was, and that this was her artful way of scraping acquaintance. She had taken possession of his chair, with his name upon it, waiting for him to come and claim his property, and expecting the conversation which would be sure to follow.

He was conscious of a shock of disappointment. In spite of the witching, curled eyelashes, he had not fancied her that sort of obvious, flirting girl; and like other spoiled young men a conquest which fell to him easily was less worth making. Nevertheless, he still wanted to know her. No man, even a spoiled one, could help wanting to know a girl with eyes like those: and he intended to go through the whole programme which he believed that she had deliberately planned out for him; yet he wished that she had not made herself so cheap.

The chair next to his was unoccupied, though usurpers were warned off by the name of "Mr. James R. Smythe," boldly painted in black letters across the back. Stretching away to the left was a row of Smythe chairs, which Val did not trouble to count. He merely received the impression of a large family of impending Smythes, and was glad that they were not assembled. Their absence gave him a splendid chance to make the girl with the eyes a present of the flirtation she encouraged.

Val, risking the avalanche of Smythehood which might overwhelm him at any instant, sat down in the empty chair next to his own, expecting the girl to glance up and down, and flutter the coquettish lashes. To his bewilderment her tactics were more subtle. She did not look up at all, but calmly went on reading her book, a volume of disagreeably intellectual suggestion.

This development of the game was interesting, because surprising, but Val still regarded it as a game. He looked at the girl, while she, apparently unconscious of or indifferent to his nearness, slowly turned leaf after leaf. She turned so many that Loveland grew impatient. Besides, a man had begun to walk up and down in front of the line of Smythe chairs, fastening upon him so baleful an eye that he feared at any instant to be dispossessed of his borrowed resting-place.

At last he decided to be bold and wait no longer.

"What am I to do if Mr. James R. Smythe comes along and orders me out?" he asked pleasantly, in a low yet conversational tone.

The girl glanced up for the first time, suddenly and as if startled. She had the air of having been deeply absorbed in her book, and of not being sure that her neighbour had spoken to her. Also she looked extremely young and innocent.

"I said, what am I to do if Mr. James R. Smythe comes along and orders me out?" Val repeated.

"That's what I thought you said," replied the girl, meeting his admiring, quizzical eyes with a somewhat bewildered yet defensive gaze. "But—why should you say it to me?"

"Isn't that rather hard-hearted of you?" asked Loveland.

"I don't understand you at all," said the girl. "You look like a gentleman, so I suppose you can't mean to be rude or impertinent. But if not, you seem to be talking nonsense."

This was straightforward, to say the least, yet her voice was so sweet and girlish, with such a dainty little drawl in it, that the rebuke did not sound as severe as if spoken with sharper accents.

"Of course I don't mean to be rude or impertinent," Loveland defended himself, at a loss for the next move in the game. "But I thought—that is, I mean—you know, that *is* my chair. I'm delighted you should have it—"

"Your chair?" echoed the girl. "Oh, you are mistaken. No wonder, if you thought that I—but even then, you couldn't have dreamed I'd take it on purpose?"

"No—o, I——" began Loveland, looking guilty.

Her eyes were on him. "You did think so!" she exclaimed. "I see you did. That was why you—and yet I don't see how you could have fancied I should know who you were, unless—Are you a very famous person in the life to which it's pleased London to call you?"

Lord Loveland laughed rather foolishly. But he reddened a little, which made him look boyish, so that the foolishness was rather engaging.

"I think you've punished me enough," he said.

"Then you admit that you deserve to be punished?"

"Perhaps."

"Which means that you did believe I took your chair on purpose."

"I didn't stop to think," said Loveland, telling the truth as usual, but less truculently than usual.

"You *are* English, aren't you?" the girl asked, looking at him with her brown, bewildering eyes.

"Oh yes," replied Loveland, in a tone which added "Of course." But he would have realised now, if he had not been sure before, that the girl was genuinely ignorant of his important identity.

"I was sure you were. I suppose you don't understand American girls very well, or perhaps any girls yet. But then few men do, really. Except poets or novelists. And you're not a poet or a novelist?"

"Rather not!"

"You speak as though I'd asked if you were a pick-pocket. Do you despise writers?"

"I'd be sorry to be one. Wouldn't you?" He ventured this question, which, if answered, might after all send them on the way towards a more friendly understanding. But he seemed destined to put himself in the wrong—although the girl laughed.

"I *am* one," she said, "I write stories."

"You're chaffing."

"No, I'm not. Why should you think so?"

"Oh, well, because you don't look as if you wrote."

"Thank you. I suppose you mean that for a compliment. But women who write aren't scare-crows nowadays, if they ever were."

"Well, anyhow, you're too young."

"I've been writing stories—and getting them published, too, ever since I was sixteen. That's some years ago now. Please don't say you wouldn't have thought it! That would be too obvious even for an average American's idea of an average Englishman."

"Are you an average American?"

"Are you an average Englishman?"

"Is it fair to answer one question with another?"

"It's said to be American. Didn't you know that?"

"No," said Loveland. "As you thought, I don't know much about Americans yet. I'm going over to the States to learn."

"The States! How English that sounds! We think we're all of America—all that's worth talking about in ordinary conversation. But, by the way, this isn't ordinary conversation, is it? It began with—something to be punished for, on your part; and a wish to punish on mine. It's gone on—because, being a writing person, I suppose, I'm always trying for new points of view, at any cost. You thought I'd taken your chair—as if it were a point of view. I believe you really did think that."

"I did," admitted Val.

"I wonder why? My aunt's name is on it."

"Oh," said Loveland.

"See," went on the girl, leaning forward, and displaying the label in the deck-steward's handwriting.

"I do see," said Val. "But that happens to be my name."

"Loveland?"

"Yes."

The girl blushed brightly. And she was more attractive than ever when she blushed. "Oh, how very odd! Then perhaps this *is* your chair! How perfectly horrid." She began to unwind herself from the rug which was wrapped round her as a chrysalis round an incipient butterfly.

"Please don't get up." Loveland's tone was almost imploring. "Do keep the chair. I want you to keep it."

"Thank you very much. But I don't want to keep it, if it's yours, and I think now it probably is. If it weren't, you wouldn't have expected to find it waiting for you in this particular place?"

"But you expected to find yours here."

"No, it wasn't that. But as I was passing, I saw my aunt's name on the back of a chair, and because the deck-steward had been told to put one in a nice sheltered place, I took it for granted that this was hers. I didn't know there was another Loveland on the passenger list."

"I noticed there was a Mrs. Loveland," said Val, "but didn't think much about it, as she wasn't likely to turn out a relation of mine. And my name isn't on the list, I came in the place of—another man."

As he made this explanation, with a slight pause which meant the recollection of his promise to Jim Harborough, Major Cadwallader Hunter went by, walking slowly; and, having long-distance ears, heard as he passed. He was waiting for his chance to "nobble" Lord Loveland; and afterwards he remembered those few last words which he had caught. He seldom forgot anything which could possibly matter, even though it might be of seeming insignificance at the time.

"I'll go and look for the *other* Loveland chair," said the girl.

"You must do nothing of the sort," exclaimed Val.

"Oh, it's easy to see you're an Englishman. American men don't order us about like that."

Loveland laughed. "I didn't order you about. I ordered you to sit still."

"That's just as bad. You have the air of being used to give orders."

"I am. You see, I'm a soldier."

"Oh, what a relief. I began to be afraid you were a duke."

Loveland had the unusual sensation of feeling comparatively unimportant. When the girl came to find out who he was, she would know that he was less than a duke. And if he had the air of being a duke, she had the air of thinking no duke could possibly be superior to any self-respecting American.

As he reflected upon this extreme point of view, a deck-steward appeared, and was summoned by the girl. She wished to know the situation of the second Loveland chair, and which of the two was her aunt's, which this gentleman's—Mr. Loveland's.

"Or ought I to speak of you as Captain Loveland?" she broke off to ask.

"I'm not a captain yet," answered Val. He did not explain that neither was he "Mr." He left her to discover that fact for herself by and by, as he hoped she would discover a good many other things connected with him. Because by this time he had quite decided that, be she rich or be she poor, he would see a good deal of Mrs. Loveland's niece during the voyage to New York. Afterwards—but then, why begin now to think of an afterwards?

CHAPTER SIX

CATSPAWING

When the chair of Mrs. Loveland had been indicated, as it soon was by a tactless deck-steward, the girl was obstinate in her determination to seek it. Val went with her, carrying the rug and the book; but as there was no vacant place on either side of the new chair, he was obliged presently to go back to his own. And it was on the way back that Major Cadwallader Hunter's chance came.

"Lord Loveland, I see you don't remember me," he began, attaching himself to the younger man, with an air of "should auld acquaintance be forgot" in the bend of his back, and speaking in a low tone, that his words might not be heard by any curious ears. Then he hurried on, lest Loveland should deny him with undesirable frankness: "Quite natural you shouldn't remember" (which indeed it was, as they had never come within miles of each other) "but I feel I've some right to remind you of my existence, because we're connected in a way. I am Major Cadwallader Hunter —"

"Never heard the name in my life," said Loveland rudely. He thought that his uninvited

companion looked like a bore, and he had never yet suffered a bore gladly. A flash of reflection told him that he possessed no envelope in Jim's or Betty's handwriting addressed to Major Cadwallader Hunter. The fellow would hardly be so mildly ingratiating if he were a millionaire with daughters to guard, and Val resented a trumped-up claim of connection.

Cadwallader Hunter could swallow a snub with a smile, but never would he forgive the snubber.

He smiled now; but if Lord Loveland had not been Lord Loveland——

"I'm a distant relative of Jimmy Harborough's," he explained, "and I generally run over to London for a few weeks in the season. Jim seems to be as popular on your side the water as on his own."

Loveland did not trouble himself to reply. If Jim had thought this alleged relative an interesting or profitable person for him to know, the name of Major Cadwallader Hunter would probably have been on one of the introduction envelopes.

Undismayed by the chilling silence, Cadwallader Hunter still walked by Lord Loveland's side and prattled. His next sentence hinted that he possessed in some degree the quality of clairvoyance.

"I suppose Jim's given you lots of letters," he continued, "but it's not likely there's one to me. I'm a mere bachelor, and therefore must take a back place. Jim would naturally send you to married people with big houses of their own, where they can entertain you. Still, in my own small way, I can be useful to strangers, and should be glad to be useful to you, because in my eyes you don't seem quite a stranger. I am, by the by, a great admirer of your cousin, charming Lady Betty, and if you'll allow me to say so, there's a strong family resemblance between you." (Major Cadwallader Hunter had been out of America during Betty's visit, but had seen her photograph.) "If this is your first time on our side, you don't know the ropes yet, and you must let me tell you anything you care to hear; about people, about places, about hotels; about the sights, should you want to see them. I can begin, for instance, by telling you who is Who on this ship. There are several of our millionaires."

Loveland's handsome young face lost its frozen stare. He had taken a dislike to Cadwallader Hunter, but it was not so serious a dislike that he could not bury it. He wanted to know several things which this man might be able to tell, but most of all he wanted to know about the niece of Mrs. Loveland. As he confessed to her, he had passed over the coincidence of names with indifference, when idly noting it on the passenger-list, thinking that the existence of a Mrs. B. Loveland could not concern the Marquis of that ilk. Now, however, if this know-all, officious sort of person could prove that the lady sprang from the same stock, be she no matter how remote a cutting, it would be pleasant news.

Cadwallader Hunter, who was a student of faces, saw the change on Lord Loveland's features and was relieved, though relief brought no liking. He had begun to be anxious as to the result of the conversation, because a failure to thaw on Loveland's part would have been awkward after certain boasts lately made. Now he saw that he had, as usual, taken the right tack, and that his efforts were destined to succeed.

"I know almost everybody on board," went on the American. "That is, everybody who counts."

"Who is that man walking with the tall girl in grey?" Val deigned to enquire, as his first choice among the beauties of the ship came in sight. "Is he someone of importance?"

Cadwallader Hunter naturally understood that it was the girl, not the man, in whom Loveland was interested. "That is Judson R. Coolidge," he replied, "and it is Miss Elinor Coolidge, his only child, who is with him. He is a rich man, though not one of our richest. Made his money in the wholesale dry goods business in Chicago. But Miss Elinor, whom he adores, 'runs' him (the mother's dead); and as the girl knows her market value, she's induced her father to take a big house in New York and a cottage at Newport. Would you care to meet them?"

"Thanks, yes. A little later," answered Val, very civilly for him.

"There are several other pretty young women on board," said Cadwallader Hunter.

"So I've noticed," said Loveland.

"Ah, men of your country appreciate the charming women of ours! You've carried away many of our fairest flowers. And some of the best worth plucking."

"Is that a pun?" asked Loveland, staring at his companion to see if he had the impudence to mean anything.

Major Cadwallader Hunter tittered. He had an irritating little habit of tittering when he was ingratiating himself with new acquaintances. But it was a most refined titter.

"Oh, dear, I see what you mean. But, no indeed, I was quite innocent of any *double entendre*. I was merely trying my best to be poetical, I assure you. There was no question of 'plucking' in the international alliances of British titles and American dollars I had in mind. A familiar, and, to my idea, suitable combination. But perhaps you disapprove of international marriages?"

"Not I," said Val.

The tone told Cadwallader Hunter all that he wanted to learn. He now knew, if he had not been practically sure before, that Lord Loveland was in search of a rich wife. He saw his way to

earning considerable kudos in playing bear-leader to a young and unusually good-looking British peer, and he determined to become that bear-leader, whether the bear yearned for his leadership or not.

"Miss Coolidge is not the only handsome heiress on board. There are others—there are others," he went on airily. "You have only to point out any young lady whose acquaintance you would like to make, and the thing is a *fait accompli*."

"Do you know a Mrs. Loveland on the ship?" Val enquired, after a slight hesitation which he could hardly have explained to himself.

Major Cadwallader Hunter shook his head. "Now that you speak of it, I think I do recall there being a Mrs. Loveland on the passenger-list, but——"

"She has a niece," said Val.

"Ah?" The elder man pulled a folded passenger-list out of his pocket, and ran his eye down the "L's." "Then the niece has not the same name. But I'll engage to find out all about the ladies for you, if you're interested in them."

Loveland paused for an instant, on the point of refusing the service. But he reflected that making enquiries about unknown ladies was not a dignified proceeding, and that he would prefer to have Major Cadwallader Hunter undertake it, rather than compromise himself.

"It will be easy for me, as I know so many people," volunteered the American.

"Oh, very well. Thank you," said Loveland, stiffly, with that upward inflection of the voice, which can make a "thank you" as irritating as a mosquito-bite.

He was ready now to use Major Cadwallader Hunter for catspawing in all its branches, but did not intend to be over civil in return. He divined that Cadwallader-Hunter by name was a Tuft-Hunter by nature; that vast wealth, or even a really good title was to him balm in Gilead; and that he was not one of those sensitive souls who find it difficult to be kind to the rich, for fear of being misunderstood by the world.

And the would-be leader was delighted to become Lord Loveland's catspaw, because he hoped that his way of handling the chestnuts would do him honour. He believed that, if through Lord Loveland he did not become King of all the lions in New York that season, he might at least be King's jester.

Presently, still smiling, he left Val stretched luxuriously in the labelled deck-chair, and trotted away to tell more people what a charming fellow Lord Loveland was. All the while it would have done his soul good—what there was of it—to box Val's ears. But it would have done him still more good to be re-souled or even half-souled, for all that he had ever possessed was long ago worn to rags.

Major Cadwallader Hunter prided himself on being able to find out everything about everybody, even when starting from the point of complete ignorance, and handicapped by a time limit. Indeed, he had a nice detective instinct, and putting it to use was one of the games he played best. But he found himself confronted with difficulties in the case of Mrs. Loveland and her niece.

It was simple to find out the girl's name, and that Mrs. Loveland, the aunt, was a delicate little person, at that time of life when sensible women cling no longer to the ragged edge of youth, as a bat clings to a shutter. It was easy to learn (stewards and stewardesses reveal such things, if handled by experts) that Mrs. Loveland had slipped into her berth on starting, with the intention of remaining there during the whole voyage, weather or no weather. But as to Wealth and as to Ancestors (Cadwallader Hunter was as devout a worshipper of Ancestors as any Chinaman) the matter was more difficult. However, he was eventually fortunate enough to stumble upon an acquaintance, a Mrs. Milton, who had met Mrs. Loveland and her niece while travelling in England. Mrs. Milton was a charming woman, but she had some weaknesses. In a sojourn of six weeks, she had become so much more English than the English that she had taken to calling her daughter Fanny "Fawny." She pitied Mrs. Loveland and Mrs. Loveland's niece because they were so—"so *unnecessarily* American, don't you know?" Also she was perfectly certain from their way of doing things, from remarks they had let drop, and answers they had given to her questions, that they were nobodies. They lived in a town in the middle west, knew no New York people, poor things, and were altogether provincial. They had been abroad for the first time, had enjoyed themselves with the most countrified enthusiasm everywhere, and were so much interested in history and dull subjects of that sort that Fawny's mother fancied they were perhaps schoolteachers on their holidays, especially as they were so reserved about their own affairs, that there must be something they were ashamed of.

Major Cadwallader Hunter was glad to hear these damaging details, because it was evident that the Englishman was taken with Mrs. Loveland's niece. The self-appointed bear-leader wanted his bear for more important girls.

It was not till nearly dinner-time that he was able to make his report to Loveland. Meanwhile, during his leader's absence, the bear had found out some things for himself, and had forgotten Major Cadwallader Hunter. Val had felt the need of another constitutional, and seeing his namesake's niece struggling with a wind-blown rug, had tucked it round her feet. They were pretty feet, and Val was very fastidious about a woman's feet. These were even prettier, and

many sizes smaller than Miss Coolidge's, therefore he was glad that a next-door chair stood empty for the moment. He begged so meekly to sit down and talk for a little while, that his mother, could she have heard him, would have trembled lest he might be sickening for something. But he had talked for more than a "little while," and then had been forced to go because the owner of the next-door chair came back and hovered suggestively.

Loveland had only just got up, and was taking his leave when Major Cadwallader Hunter arrived from the Music-room, where he had been gleaning facts. "She is a Miss Dearmer," he announced.

"Oh, I know that already," Val returned, ungratefully. "She told me herself."

"Lesley Dearmer."

"I hadn't got as far as the Lesley yet." Val laughed lightly, for he had had a delightful conversation with Miss Dearmer. That cleft in her chin had not proved a trap to catch the unwary, whom it tempted to expect a merry wit. And while Loveland sat beside her, she had flung bright thought after bright thought, carelessly as a cashier in a bank shovels out gold for other people's purses. He had never met a girl like Miss Dearmer. No wonder she could write stories. But he felt it was far more suitable that she should entertain the Marquis of Loveland.

"Of course you must do exactly as you please," said Cadwallader Hunter, "but from what I've learned, I fancy you can pass your valuable time better on this trip than in the society of Miss Dearmer."

"What do you mean?" Val flashed out at him.

"Oh, only that it's just as I thought. She and her aunt are ordinary, provincial little people, with no money or connections. They live in the southwest, near a city called Louisville. These ladies, aunt and niece, have been 'doing' as much of Europe as they could afford, and are now returning to their native wilds, where they'll probably stay for the remainder of their respectable, colourless lives."

The picture was not alluring, and Loveland's face fell.

"Mr. and Miss Coolidge are at your table," said Cadwallader Hunter, "and I've just been arranging to sit there, too, so I can introduce you this evening at dinner. You'll be next Miss Coolidge, and opposite, you'll have a very nice girl, a Miss Fanny Milton, who admires Englishmen. Her mother is a youngish woman with a temper. She doesn't get on well with her husband, but he is a very rich man who must give a dot of at least five hundred thousand to his daughter. These people are friends of mine, and will be very pleased to know you."

Loveland did not doubt the last statement, nor did he feel grateful to his benefactor, this general provider of charming, rich young ladies. He was sulkily regretting that Miss Dearmer was poor and provincial, and altogether impossible as the future Lady Loveland.

CHAPTER SEVEN

GUIDE, PHILOSOPHER AND FRIEND

"Well," said the girl, "what do you think of things?"

"I think," answered Loveland, "it's a beastly shame we're not put at the same table."

"I mean of things in general."

"I prefer to think of you in particular."

"It wouldn't pay," said the girl, with one of her whimsical smiles.

Loveland looked at her sharply. "What makes you say that?" he wanted to know.

"Because it's true."

"Why do you insinuate that I only want to do things that pay?"

"I told you I wrote stories, didn't I? Well, to write stories, one must make a study of Man. I do. And I never found it dull yet."

"I'm glad you don't find it dull where I'm concerned," said Val. "But I'm not glad you consider me a swine."

"Lucky I've just been in England, and heard other Englishmen talk," said the girl. "If not, I should hardly understand that pretty expression."

"So you've been making a study of other Englishmen? What did you think of us?"

"That you, as a race, are very tall and tweedy. And that you aren't precisely dissatisfied with yourselves."

It was the next morning, and they were pacing up and down the long white deck. Loveland had

joined Miss Dearmer as she walked, and she had not been repellent in her manner. Yet somehow her friendliness did not encourage him to increasing conceit. Even before she had made that little remark about studying Man, he had vaguely felt that she read him as if he were a cypher of which she had found the key.

"I hope you met the right kind of men," he said.

"You mean, men like you? You see, I know who you are, now."

"Who told you anything about me?"

"Miss Milton."

"Oh, you know her—daughter of the white-faced woman, pretty, blushy little thing who sits at my table?"

"Yes. We were travelling in England at the same time, and met often at hotels."

"What did Miss Milton say about me?"

"Do you really want to know?"

"Yes. I'm not a coward."

"She said she wondered if you were going over to our country to try and marry an American girl."

"By Jove! Well, supposing I do try, what's your opinion? Do you think I stand a good chance of bringing it off?"

"It's rather soon for me to judge."

"You seem to have made up your mind quickly about some of my other qualities. About my wanting to do things which pay, for instance."

"You haven't forgiven me that? It might pay to 'try' and marry an American girl."

"Well," admitted Loveland on an impulse, "no matter how much I might want to, I couldn't marry one if it didn't pay."

"Now you are being frank," replied Miss Lesley. "I like people to be frank."

"So do I," said Loveland, "when that doesn't mean being disagreeable, as it generally does from one's relations, especially one's maiden aunts."

"England expects that every aunt will do her duty."

"Luckily *you're* not my aunt, so please don't do yours if it's unpleasant. But couldn't we be frank—and friends? I should like most awfully to have you for my friend. You could be no end valuable to me, you know, about giving me good advice, if you would."

She laughed. "I dare say. But could you be valuable to me?"

Loveland wished that he might dare to be dangerous; but the idea of having her for a friend, into whose pink shell of an ear he could pour confidences, really attracted him—since her value, not being cash value, could be realised by him in no other way. And, of course, if she would promise to be his friend, it would be caddish to make love to her. He felt very virtuous as he laid down this rule for himself.

"I'll let you study me as much as you like, and put me into your next story."

"As the villain?"

He looked rather blank. His conception for himself was always the part of hero.

"But after all, it's usually baronets who're villains—in stories and plays," she went on. "A Marquis—you are a Marquis, aren't you—may perhaps be a fellow being."

"Please treat me as such, then," said Loveland.

"I will, anyway till further notice. Now you may begin to tell me frank things, and I'll give you frank advice about them, as a friend."

"How I wish you were rich!" exclaimed Loveland, thinking aloud, as he did sometimes.

"How do you know I'm not? Oh, of course Major Cadwallader Hunter found out for you. He would! He's the sort of man who takes a worm's eye view of the world, and of women and wealth. But never mind if I'm not rich."

"I do mind. I shouldn't want you for a friend if you were."

"You wouldn't—oh! Well, now you are being still franker, aren't you?"

"You said you liked people to be frank."

"Ye—es."

"I haven't offended you, have I?"

"No. I'm just getting used to you. It's quite interesting. What do you want my advice about? Other girls, I suppose?"

"It may come to that," Loveland admitted.

"Anyone in particular, at the moment?"

"Well, supposing I were forced to marry money, for the sake of—of—my estates and all that, is there anyone on board you'd recommend?"

"You've two very eligible girls at your table."

"Yes. But hang it all, it's too much of a good thing having them at one's elbow like that, you know. If only it were you, instead—"

"On the principle of having the poor always with one. But for that you'd have to change and sit at mine. We're all poor there, I think. It's the Ineligible's Table, for both sexes. Would you care to come?"

"I'd care to, but I couldn't afford it," said Val. "I must stop where I am and take the goods the gods provide."

"You mean the dining-room steward who arranged the seats."

"What else did Miss Milton say about me?"

"That you were very good-looking—as we're being frank."

"I hope you agreed with her?"

"Oh, yes, I had to. Your looks are so obvious—so much a part of your stock-in-trade, if you don't mind my saying so, it would be silly to deny that the shop windows are well decorated. It was apropos of your marrying that she spoke. I said a handsome man oughtn't to be driven into the obscurity of marriage, by necessity. He ought simply to be supported by the nation, become a sort of public institution, and be the pride of his country; be sent, beautifully got up, to walk in Parks, and dance at balls, and make life pleasant for girls."

"Thank you. Anything else?"

"From Miss Milton or me?"

"From you."

"Nothing more from me. The rest was silence."

"From Miss Milton, then?"

"Let me see. She said it seemed as if you'd bought your eyelashes by the yard, and been frightfully extravagant."

"Wish I could pawn them!"

"If you marry as you intend, you won't need to."

"I say, I'm afraid you're frightfully sarcastic," said Loveland, who had never had an American girl for a friend before, and found that having one kept his hands full. "You think I'm a beast to marry a girl for her money."

"First catch your hare."

"You mean I mayn't get one to take me."

"One never can tell. There have been slips between cup and lip."

"Although I'm poor, I can give my wife a lot of things a woman likes to have."

"Second best things."

"Oh, come! You haven't stopped to think what they are."

"I've stopped to think that love's the best thing—the thing a girl cares most for a man to give her."

"It seems to me that all the girls I know would be pretty well satisfied with the right to walk into a dining-room behind a Duchess, and—"

"Do you? What a lot you've got to learn about girls."

"I don't think I have," said Val. "I think I know most of it."

"About life, then, and about yourself."

"Oh, I know nearly all there is to be known about them."

"You really do need a friend," laughed the girl.

"To keep me from being bored?"

"To keep you from heaps of things."

"Well, go on being my friend, and giving me good advice, please," said Loveland. "There's Miss Coolidge, too. She's a beautiful creature. Are there many other girls in the States as beautiful as she?"

"As beautiful, but few more beautiful."

"Any beautiful ones richer?"

"I'm not up in that kind of statistics. Major Cadwallader Hunter is."

"Yes. But I don't care for the fellow. I'd rather take counsel with you. Do you know Miss Coolidge?"

"No."

"I wish you did."

"Would you like me to use my influence with her?"

"I should like you to use your influence with me to keep me up to the mark. She's rather hard to talk to. So different from you."

"She knows her value. She's 'worth' several millions, as we say in America. (I wish we didn't!) Why should she worry to make herself agreeable? She can get all the attention she wants without bothering. Whereas, we poor girls have to work hard, if we want to be popular in spite of our poverty."

"I suppose there's something in that," said Loveland, too deeply absorbed in his own affairs not to take her in earnest. And the girl would have liked to turn a scornful shoulder upon him, if his voice had not been so nice, and if he had not been so handsome. As it was, she wanted to turn upon herself, because she knew that she was influenced by the nice voice, the clear features, and the black-lashed blue eyes. "He is a perfectly worthless young man," she reflected savagely, yet she did not tell him, as he deserved, that she had reconsidered and would not after all undertake the extra hard work of being his guide, philosopher and friend.

"It will be an experience for me," she thought. And she remembered that she had summed up his character from the first. The revelations he had just made of his inner self ought not now to surprise her.

So the days went on. And the pair remained friends; a state of affairs which took more of Val's time than he should have spared from his real ambitions.

Loveland had tried at intervals to be nice to Miss Coolidge and Miss Milton, and he met other pretty girls to whom he felt obliged to be agreeable, because Major Cadwallader Hunter said that they were heiresses. But it is difficult to be equally nice to five or six charming young women at once and within a comparatively limited area, when you have not made up your mind which of them you want to marry, or whether you will not in the end throw them all over to marry someone else whom you have not yet seen. And it is a particularly difficult task when you would prefer to be nice to someone else whom you have already seen.

Besides, Lord Loveland thought too much of himself to pretend love-making successfully when, so far from being in love, he was considerably bored. Each girl he knew on the ship bored him in her own separate way, except his friend Miss Dearmer, to whom he went frequently for good advice about the others. Perhaps if he had not known her, the other girls, or some of them, would not have bored him. But as it was, they were occasionally tiresome in his eyes when he would have liked to be with Lesley instead; and though Lord Loveland was clever, he was not clever enough to hide his feelings. Sometimes, so sure was he of their forgiveness if he wanted it, he was downright rude; and there is nothing a nice American girl forgives less easily than rudeness which springs from a man's self-conceit.

At first, all the girls had admired Loveland, not only because he had a title, but because he was himself; and some of the younger ones, like Fanny Milton and Madge Beverly, had been inclined to regard him as a starry Paladin. Fanny said he was "so handsome, it almost hurt," and that she "could hardly talk to him for gazing at his Gibson chin." But when the more sophisticated Eva Turner, Elinor Coolidge, Kate Wood and a few others realised that their starry Paladin was impudently inspecting them all with a view to the possible purchase of the most satisfactory, each began to hate him secretly with forty-woman power. Secretly, because there was a kind of glory in him as an asset, and a rivalry for the asset, just as there might be among smaller girls with only one doll—an unlovable but expensive doll—to play with. Not one of the number would sacrifice all right in the doll, and give it up to her companions.

They were worldly, though good-hearted, girls to whom Major Cadwallader Hunter had introduced his prize, and they foresaw that handsome Lord Loveland would be petted, perhaps fought for, in Society, when he had left the little world of the *Mauretania* for the bigger world of New York. There would be an advantage in having known him first in case he should become the "rage," as he was sure to do, if not too insufferably rude and offensive. Thinking of this, each girl clung to her share of him, and refrained from trampling on the expensive doll, as, for her pride's sake, she ached to do. Nor did Elinor Coolidge and Fanny Milton and the rest speak their true feelings frankly out to one another. Each wished her friends to believe that he was nice to her

alone, that his insolence was charmed into lamb-like docility in a duet with her; for in that way self-respect could be maintained and jealousy aroused.

Val was unaware of the hatred, but conscious of the rivalry, and was altogether kept very busy. He forgot to Marconi to his mother that he had sailed on the *Mauretania*, as Jim Harborough had thought he might forget. As for writing, he had not a moment for any such sedentary employment. Once or twice he did make up his mind to begin a letter to Lady Loveland; but, when he could get a few minutes off duty, it seemed such a waste of time not to go and ask for good advice from Lesley Dearmer, that somehow pen was never put to paper.

And so at last came the day for landing.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HAIL TO THE LAND: GOODBYE TO THE GIRL

The *Mauretania* passed the noble statue of Liberty enlightening the world, and Loveland admired her impersonally, but felt that had she been a live millionairess he would not have dared propose to her.

Then, presently, the hugeness of the great city loomed monstrous, mountainous in purple shadow against such a blue sky as Italy and New York know.

A crowd was massed on the dock to welcome the *Mauretania* and her passengers; and for the first time since he had left England, Val felt a vague homesickness stirring in his breast. Almost everyone else on board seemed to have at least one handkerchief-waving friend, and some had half a dozen, but all the smiling eager faces looking up were strange to his eyes. There was no one for him; and he had a sudden, queer sensation of not being at home in the world. This, in spite of invitations from everybody he had met on the ship—except one: the One who mattered.

Mr. Coolidge and several other fathers and uncles of pretty girls had asked him to make their house his home; but he had taken Jim Harborough's advice to heart, and excused himself warily. His idea was to let New York society pass before his eyes in review, before risking a premature entanglement. To this course he committed himself in cold blood. Since he could not have Lesley Dearmer, all that mattered to him in a girl was decent manners, decent looks, and—many millions.

He should have rejoiced that it was time to land, and have felt keen to set to work upon the business which had brought him across the sea, but he was in no mood to rejoice at anything; and it was Lesley Dearmer's fault.

He had planned a moonlight farewell for the night before, but Lesley thwarted him by talking the whole evening long with a sporting youth, whom Val wrathfully stigmatised in his mind as suffering from motor bicycle face, bridge eye, clutch knee and tennis elbow. Then when she had tired of her flirtation she went to bed.

Next morning it was only as the *Mauretania* neared her slip that the girl appeared again. Without seeming to notice Loveland she stood leaning her elbows on the rail, not far from him. It occurred to Val that after all it was a matter of no importance to her that their lives were to be lived apart. And the separation was at hand. He had thought of this hour, but now it was here. He was going to lose her. Tomorrow, and all the tomorrows, he would have no sweet, merry, mysterious-eyed friend to advise him and listen half-amused, half in earnest, to his confidences.

Suddenly his heart felt like a large, cold boiled beetroot in his breast. He went and stood behind the girl, dumb with a strange new misery he could not understand, and, as though she had heard the "unerring speech" of his silence, she turned.

At first her beautiful brown eyes flashed a laughing challenge at him, as if they said, "Wouldn't you like to make me think you really care? But I don't think it, and won't. And neither do you care. We've both been playing."

Then, something in his look softened hers. She smiled kindly, though not wholly without guile.

"Aren't you excited?" she asked.

"Why should I be excited?" he grumbled.

"Because—well, you're a soldier, and know what war is like. I've heard that the most exciting thing which can happen is a call to make a *sortie* in the middle of the night, in the midst of a dream—and on an empty stomach. But I should think the call to a matrimonial *sortie*—"

"On an empty purse?"

"Yes; when it's a question of selling yourself to fill it."

"I don't mean to sell myself. I shall still belong to myself and to one other. I won't say who that other is, for I've pretty well told you already."

"It's no use pretending not to understand. I know what you want me to *think* you mean."

"If I never knew before how much I do mean it, I know now, when I've got to say 'goodbye.'"

"You needn't say it."

"You've tried hard to keep me from saying it, haven't you? But look here, Lesley—do look at me. I'm awfully cut up at leaving you."

"You're not to call me Lesley."

"You can't prevent my calling you Lesley to myself."

"You'll soon forget the name."

"Never. I can never forget you—worse luck. The thought of you is going to come between me and—other things."

"The thought must learn better manners. Not to 'butt in,' as we say over here. Oh, it will soon be tamed. You'll have so much to do."

"I hope I shall," said Loveland. "I say, are you going to forget me as soon as we're parted?"

The girl was silent for a moment. Then she laughed. Yet her laugh had not quite the frank lightheartedness which was usually one of its charms. "I shall make a note of you for my next story but one," she answered.

"You're not very kind."

"Are you sure you deserve kindness?"

"I'm sure I want it—from you."

"How you have always got what you wanted in your life, haven't you—one way or another?"

"Life wouldn't be worth living if one didn't."

"Oh, it's not much good saying to you that that's a selfish way of looking at life. But you've never had any lessons, and I suppose you never will have. You'll go on getting what you want, and taking it for granted that you ought to get it, till the end."

"I hope so, sincerely," said Val, without shame. "But I shan't get one of the things I want most, unless you promise to write to me."

She shook her head. "I can't promise that. I wouldn't if I could. As for getting your news, I shall read it in the papers, which are sure to chronicle all Lord Loveland does and says, and a lot he doesn't do or say. The Louisville papers will have things about you, copied from New York, in the Sunday editions. Yes, I shall be able to read about you every Sunday—lots of things you wouldn't tell in letters if I let you write. I shall see rumours of your engagement, then an announcement. I wonder if it will be the survival of the prettiest; Miss Coolidge—or if you'll be knocked down—on your knees—to a higher bid?"

"You're not letting me get much pleasure out of my last moments with you," he complained, his blue eyes really pathetic. "Do you despise me, after all?"

She looked up at him. "Only one side of you," she answered, a little sadly. "But—you're rather like the moon. We see only one of her sides. The other we have to take on faith. Perhaps it's silly of me, yet sometimes—in some moods—I do take your other side on faith."

"What is there,—on that side?" he asked, eagerly.

"I don't know. And I'm sure you don't. You probably never will. For the light shines so brightly on the one turned towards the world. Now it *must* be 'goodbye.' There's my dear little aunt—who's been on deck ever since we passed Governor's Island—looking for me."

"Are these to be our last words together, then?" Val had a sickening pang. He had not known it was going to be as bad as this. And it wouldn't have been so bad, if she had seemed to care more.

"Yes, they must be the last, unless just a snippy 'goodbye, very pleased to have met you,' as we leave the ship. I wish you the best luck. Shall I say 'Thine own wish, wish I thee'?" She spoke in a hard, bright tone, just poisoning like a bird on the wing, before flitting to her aunt.

"Don't forget me. Think of me sometimes," Loveland implored, as he wrung the little hand she held out. And perhaps never in his life had there been so much true feeling in his voice.

"I will think of you sometimes," she said, as if mechanically repeating the words.

"Try and think the best of me."

"Yes. I'll try to do that, too. Goodbye."

But he would not let her hand go. It seemed to him that he could not—although he knew he must. It was all he could do to keep back a plea that she would love him, that she would marry him, even though the crumbling walls of Loveland Castle fell. But instead he stammered, "Am I never to see you again? Can't you stop in New York for a few days, and let me call on—on you and your

aunt—just to break the blow of parting?"

"No, we can't stop," she said. "We've been away from home too long already. We have lots to do. You know I work for my living."

"Those stories! Yes. But couldn't you write them in New York?"

"No, I couldn't, indeed. Aunt Barbara and I start for Louisville this afternoon. We live not far away."

"Mayn't I go with you to the train?"

"What! desert valuable friends whom it's your duty to cultivate—if you're to have flowers in the garden of your future?"

"I'd desert anyone or anything for you."

"Thank you. I believe you really mean that—this minute."

"I—"

"No. Don't protest. Sufficient for the minute is the meaning thereof. I must go—I *want* to go—while you still mean it all. And I'd rather not see you again, because I'd like to keep the memory of you as you look and are in this minute—nothing less. It will seem afterwards to justify our temporary partnership, in case I ever ask myself—Why?"

And before he could answer she was gone.

He dared not follow, and instantly lost sight of her in the crowd that poured to the rail to greet the waiting crowd below. Afterwards, on the dock, he saw her again, but only at a distance, for her aunt's luggage had been marked "D," that it might chaperon Miss Dearmer's, and enable the two ladies to keep each other company during the tedious time of waiting.

From the far off stall under the big letter "L," Loveland gazed sadly at the back of his lost friend's head, her face, either by accident or design, being turned from him. His boxes were long in coming, and as it happened that none of his ship-acquaintances were "L's," he had no one to talk to, nothing pleasanter to do than look at Miss Dearmer's back and gradually lose hope of her relenting.

She had brought a little camp-stool for her aunt, and that lady sat facing Loveland, her eyes so destitute of interest when now and then they strayed in his direction, that he began to believe her niece had never mentioned his existence. More than once he had pictured Lesley describing her aunt's distinguished namesake; had fancied Mrs. Loveland asking questions; and wished that he might hear the answers. The lady's indifference was not flattering to his self-esteem; but Mrs. Loveland did not look a woman to claim a relation because he was a peer.

Lesley's aunt was a little woman with dove-grey hair, folded like dove's wings that slanted softly down her forehead, covering her ears. Hers was a gentle face, with eyes that gazed kindly, and somehow impersonally, out upon the world. She had the air which many American mothers wear, of having contentedly stepped aside from the fore-front of life in favour of a younger generation, and of having lost interest in herself as a separate entity.

Lesley and Mrs. Loveland all got their luggage dumped down under letter "D," before a single "L" box had appeared. Then, when Val's did come, and the property of other impatient "L's" at the same time, the outside world was lost to view. Loveland got hold of a good-natured Custom House man, who, considering the indubitable fact that he was dealing with a British subject, and believing the "Britisher's" statement that he was merely on a visit to America, made no unnecessary trouble. He was in a hurry, like everybody else, and did little more than casually open the leather portmanteaux, the cabin trunk, the hat box, and the fitted suit-case glittering with coronets, which constituted Lord Loveland's luggage.

Very few minutes were wasted in the examination, though Americans all around were suffering severely. Nevertheless, when his keys were in his hand again, and Val was ready to separate himself and his belongings from the seething mass of anxious "L's," Miss Dearmer and her aunt had vanished off the face of the dock.

CHAPTER NINE

FOXHAM REDIVIVUS

Loveland tried to put thoughts of the girl out of his head as he drove through the exciting streets of New York, which seemed to him colourful and strange as a vast flower-garden, sown regardlessly. But, despite the rush and roar of "elevated trains" above his head, the swift whirr of electric trams to left, to right, of him on a level, and the bizarre effect of the "sky-scrapers," which turned long thoroughfares into shadowed valleys, he could not throw open his mind to the rush of new impressions. This brilliant New York made him feel after all a person of comparatively small importance. He began to repent having refused invitations, for instead of

bumping dolefully to a hotel, in a cab which was the least modern thing New York had shown him, he might now be spinning uptown in any one of half a dozen hospitable ten-thousand-dollar motor cars. In his isolation he regretted the Coolidges, and even Cadwallader Hunter who had pressed him to spend a day or two at his flat; however, he was consoled by the reflection that he had decided wisely, and that wisdom would be its own reward. It was better not to lend himself to anyone until he had seen everyone, and decided to whom he would permanently belong.

When the bear had refused the hospitality of its leader's cage, Cadwallader Hunter had suggested a quiet new hotel, uptown and near his apartment. But the bear did not know that it was a bear, and had tired of dictation. Loveland had heard of the Waldorf-Astoria, and he had not heard of the quiet new hotel. Men he knew, who ran over to New York on such errands as his own, stopped at the Waldorf-Astoria, or Holland House, or the Plaza, and Val, who believed that the best was only just good enough, would not risk hiding his light under a bushel. True, he had very little money, but he had plenty of invitations and was certain to have more. A couple of days at the most expensive hotel could not break him; and Jim and Betty Harborough's millionaire friends would probably expect him to be conspicuous. Now was the tide in his affairs which must be taken at the flood, and he could not afford to let his future relations-in-law (whoever they might be) learn to despise him.

Loveland's intention had been to ask for a small room, high in situation and low in price; but once inside the immense, red-brown building, which looked vast enough to hold half New York, pride tied his tongue. Pretty girls, beautifully dressed, and prosperous-looking men, with facial expressions as supercilious as his own, were standing within earshot; and Loveland could not resist satisfying an impulse of boyish vanity. He announced to a superior gentleman at a desk that he wanted a good room with a bath. His charming voice and "English accent" attracted the Americans near him, and under his mask of indifference Loveland was aware of the attention he excited.

The superior gentleman thought for a moment and consulted a book. Then he said that he had no single rooms with baths disengaged at present, but that there was a suite consisting of bedroom, bath and parlour; just one suite, and that probably would be gone in another minute.

The hint of rivalry decided Loveland. "Very well. I will take it," he said. "Here's my card, if you wish to know to whom you are letting your rooms," he went on haughtily, in response to a sharp glance from shrewd, experienced eyes. And the hotel clerk read aloud, "Marquis of Loveland."

At this, everyone who had not been staring at the handsome, arrogant young Englishman, began to stare, and Loveland was not displeased.

"My luggage will be here soon, I hope," he said, showing several metal discs about which his ideas were rather vague. The clerk answered civilly that the trunks ought to arrive in half an hour or so, and a smart youth in livery was told off to show Lord Loveland his rooms.

They were very luxurious rooms, almost too luxurious, and Loveland experienced a faint qualm as it occurred to him that he had neglected to ask the price. "But they can't come to more than five or six pounds a day at the worst," he thought, hopefully.

He had brought his suit-case in the cab, and as the letters of introduction were in a little portable writing-desk contained among the fittings, he got out the packet to read over the addresses. All the friends to whom Jim and Betty were commending him lived in New York, and Cadwallader Hunter had said that most New Yorkers were at home in November. Loveland was just deciding that the letters had better reach their destination before night, when his baggage appeared, looking not much the worse for wear.

Now was the moment when the inestimable Foxham would be really missed. On shipboard there had been little to unpack; but the contents of the portmanteaux must have been rudely stirred on the dock, and ought immediately to be rescued by an expert. Loveland touched an electric bell in his bedroom, demanded of an unexpectedly responsive telephone that the hotel should produce a valet; and criticised the product adversely when it came.

Luncheon time was near, and Val was hungry, but he would not leave wardrobe and jewellery to the discretion of a strange servant. In a mood swinging towards impatience, he sat down on a cushioned sofa to watch the valet's proceedings.

The larger of the two noble portmanteaux was opened; the neat square of gold-braided and coronetted brown velvet, with which Foxham always covered the contents of each box, was removed; and a pile of clothing was deftly excavated.

Loveland's face changed from attention to surprise, then to bewilderment. "By Jove!" he exclaimed, "those don't look like my things." Then springing up alertly he began to toss over the pile as the hotel valet deposited it upon the bed, to toss it over as a haymaker tosses hay. But, in the midst, he drew back his hand as if he had inadvertently touched pitch. "Jove!" he stammered again.

"Wrong luggage, sir?" ventured the servant.

Loveland did not reply. He did not even hear, for his thoughts had taken a trip of record quickness across the sea, and were already in London, chasing a mystery. But, if the valet had stopped to think, an answer would have been unnecessary. The keys fitted the portmanteaux; and there were the big initials and the small coronets which distinguished Lord Loveland's property

from the vulgar trunks of the common herd.

Had Foxham gone mad? For the moment Loveland could think of no other explanation. The portmanteau was filled with discarded garments, many of which Loveland had given to Foxham at parting. Other things were there, too, which Val dimly remembered having actually seen on the person of Foxham, and it was from the touch of these contaminated remnants that he recoiled in disgust.

"Open the other portmanteau," he directed, flushed now, and anxious-eyed.

The hotel servant obeyed. Another neat square of brown velvet was whisked away, and piles of shirts were revealed; but, save for a deceitful top layer, they were not Loveland's shirts. They might have been bought ready-made in the Edgware Road; probably had been—by Foxham. There was underclothing also; but not the pale pink, blue and heliotrope silk variety affected by Foxham's master.

"Now the hat box," Loveland went on, almost sure that he was talking in his sleep. For it was unbelievable that he would not soon wake up to find that this was a bad dream.

There were hats in the hat box; Foxham's hats, perhaps; certainly not Lord Loveland's. And in the boot box which came next were boots, but boots which had lost all claim to self-respect; boots which even Foxham would have found it difficult to give away.

Only the Custom House official's good nature and haste, and Loveland's complete absence of mind on the dock had delayed discovery until this moment, but now that the secret was out, there seemed nothing to do, if not to rage helplessly.

Loveland spluttered a few colourful words, but was still too bewildered by the catastrophe to become volcanic. The eruption would follow later.

"What shall I do with the things, sir?" the valet wanted to know.

"Do with them?" repeated Loveland, exasperated by the creature's calmness. "Pitch 'em into the fire—get rid of them anyhow, out of my sight, and be quick about it. I've been robbed, by my own man."

Loveland seemed to hear these words spoken by an unknown voice, as if they had been uttered by a stranger, and instantly he accepted them as the solution of the mystery.

That was it! Foxham had robbed him. Foxham had not gone mad. Foxham was simply a scoundrel.

There was too much method in the planning of this trick, even for madness.

The careful arrangement of the cabin luggage, with all the right things in the right places, except for the jewel-case containing tie pins, sleeve links and shirt studs, which for five days Loveland had believed to have been stowed away somewhere else by mistake. The packing of the portmanteaux and boxes with a nice judgment as to their proper weight and the neatness of top layers; all this was too well thought out to be the work of a lunatic.

No wonder Foxham had not asked for wages in arrear. No wonder he suddenly developed a defunct grandfather with an eccentric will. From the moment he heard of the proposed trip to America, he must have been quietly planning this *coup*, a *coup* worth making for the sake of the bran new wardrobe, to say nothing of the jewellery. And hot with rage, Loveland ran over in his mind the contents of that missing jewel-box. The pearl studs which Lady Kitty Manning had given him on his last birthday—each one of the three worth fifty pounds, if it was worth a shilling. How he wished he had sold the things, as he had been tempted to do, and would have done, if they had not been the gift of a pretty woman! The diamond and enamel sleeve-links, too, and the sapphire buttons; a hundred pounds more in Foxham's pocket. Then the cravat pins, in two long rows on a white velvet background: Loveland could see them, as he had seen them last—a cherished collection representing not only so many golden sovereigns, but so many queens of beauty, the charming givers.

What a rogue to send his master off to a strange country, stripped practically naked; and how the master longed to have the rogue within kicking distance, instead of safe across the sea.

Forgotten faults of Foxham's flashed back into his memory; small slynesses winked at, or condoned; rumoured "airs" assumed in the servants' hall at country houses; fibs found out and overlooked, because no other valet had Foxham's skill and resourcefulness. Still—who would have expected such depravity?

If this blow had fallen on some other man, Loveland would have laughed, and chaffed him; but he was far from seeing his own predicament as a laughing matter. He was like a knight of old who, having journeyed to a far land to joust for a great prize, finds himself robbed of his armour. How was he to fight on the tilting ground of society, and bear away a millionairess, when his sole possessions consisted of what he stood up in, and the contents of a suit-case and a cabin trunk?

Luckily Foxham had not been able to annex his master's letter of credit; but Val had uses for the hundred and fifty pounds other than buying a new outfit. How he wished now that he had not played Bridge quite so often on board ship, emptying his pockets of spare cash. The scrape he was in was as hard to win out of as a black London fog; and while groping for light, a mild

question from the hotel valet did not sweeten his temper.

"Am I really to carry all these things away, sir?"

"Oh, go to the devil and take them with you!"

The servant—lest he remember that he had been born a man, and retaliate—bolted towards safety, with a leaning tower of Foxham's garments on his arm. It was nobody's business how he meant to dispose of them; and a second later he would have passed the danger line, had not a page boy selected that identical instant to knock at Lord Loveland's door.

Man and youth collided. The top-heavy pile of clothing crumbled into ruin, Foxham's loathed shirts and waistcoats blotting out the threshold. What the valet said, long habits of servitude rendered inaudible, but what Loveland said might have been heard at the end of the corridor. And there were listeners nearer: Major Cadwallader Hunter and a companion who "represented" one of New York's leading newspapers.

CHAPTER TEN

THE VALLEY OF DISAPPOINTMENT

Major Cadwallader Hunter had been somewhat doubtful of his wisdom in paying this uninvited call. He had hinted that he might drop in at the Waldorf to see how Lord Loveland got on, and had not been encouraged to do so. But Tony Kidd of "New York Light" was a pretty good excuse for persevering, and he certainly had been badly in want of an excuse.

Having cast himself for the part of bear-leader it was imperative that Society should know who led the bear, whether the bear recognised his position or not.

Had he, like Loveland, been merely a guest in America, he would have left the ship's dock when Lord Loveland left, and have been able to show all whom it concerned at the Waldorf-Astoria that Loveland was his property. But he was subjected by the dreaded Custom House officials to treatment very different from that meted out to the Englishman, being baited and bullied as if he were a bear instead of a bear-leader.

The detention, however, proved a blessing in disguise, for it gave him Mr. Anthony Kidd of "Light." The journalist, sent down by his paper to meet the *Mauretania*, had just exhausted the available supply of home-coming millionaires when he spied Major Cadwallader Hunter, and carelessly culled him by the way, as worth a short paragraph at the bottom of a column.

Cadwallader Hunter was glad of a paragraph anywhere, but thought he saw his way to one higher up, perhaps even with a headline. So he happened to mention "a connection of his," the Marquis of Loveland who had been on board, though, for reasons, the noble name did not appear on the passenger list, and Mr. Kidd took the bait. Loveland was described by his alleged cousin as a "dear boy," so handsome, so clever; one of the oldest peerages in England, et cetera, et cetera; in the Grenadier Guards, don't you know, and all that sort of thing. Had gone on ahead to secure rooms at the Waldorf-Astoria, though invitations had been showered upon him by the best people on board ship. As soon as he could escape with life and luggage Cadwallader Hunter intended to pay a friendly call and inspect Lord Loveland's new quarters.

Of course Mr. Kidd wanted to call, too, and get a "story" for his paper. But at this suggestion the bear-leader shook his head. Charming fellow as Loveland was when you knew him, he was rather a difficult man to approach, and had some ridiculous prejudice against American pressmen. Certainly, unless influence were brought to bear, he would refuse to see Mr. Kidd; but Cadwallader Hunter would like to do "Light" a good turn, and give the paper a chance for a "scoop." He would take Mr. Kidd under his wing, and use his persuasive powers to obtain some sort of an interview.

Perhaps there was more confidence in his manner than in his mind as he made this offer, for the bear's leader had already seen the bear's claws; but the risk was worth running. And when, arrived at the Waldorf, he had talked for a few minutes with pleasant condescension to a hotel clerk, his self-esteem had so risen that he no longer dreaded a cold reception.

Nor did he receive one. His welcome was, on the contrary, far warmer than he had expected, and the hot blast of Loveland's wrath swept him back a step or two, so that he trod hard upon Tony Kidd's most pampered toe.

A difficult young man to approach, indeed!

The representative of "New York Light" was a brilliant journalist with a keen sense of humour, and a headline jumped into his head as Cadwallader Hunter stamped upon his toe. "A Difficult Young Man to Approach." He thought he saw his way to something rather choice for tomorrow morning's "Light."

Somehow, between valet and page, the wild litter of shirts, trousers, boots, and other horrors reminiscent of Foxham, was re-built into a tower more leaning than before. Then, while the valet

scuttled away with his trailing, sliding load, the page remained behind and courageously announced the visitors.

Perhaps if Foxham had spared him a few of his favourite tie pins, or if the blow of his loss had not caught him on an empty stomach, Loveland might have seen the humour of the situation as Tony Kidd saw it. But everything was against him in a black world; and his late shipmate's intrusion with a stranger was the one last drop in a bitter cup which he refused to swallow.

Never had Cadwallader Hunter's handsome bear looked less handsome or more dangerous than he looked as he stood blocking the way to his den, at bay against fate and against his leader.

"My dear fellow, what has happened to upset you?" exclaimed Cadwallader Hunter, warned by Loveland's expression that the only hope lay in getting the first word.

"Upset me?" echoed Val, glaring blue fire so vindictively that Kidd expected his introducer to be the next one "upset." "My d——d valet has stolen all my clothes, and made me a present of his own, that's all."

"How shocking!" sympathised Cadwallader Hunter.

"Well, yes, it is rather a shock," returned Loveland drily, "and if you don't mind, I think I'd better ask you to let me get over it alone."

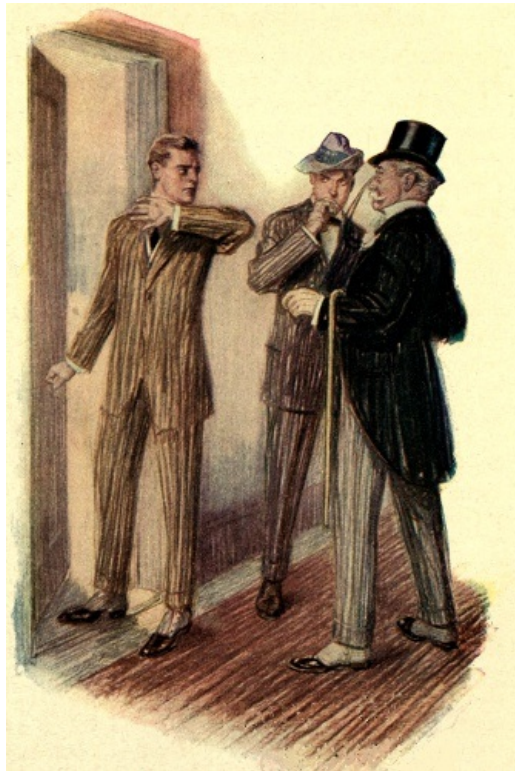
"Oh! certainly, I quite understand," purred the banished courtier. But Kidd was making mental notes, and Cadwallader Hunter strove to retain his reputation as a valued cousin. "Just a minute or two, dear boy, and we'll take ourselves off. This is Mr. Kidd, from one of our most important papers——"

"Happy to see him another time," snapped Loveland. "Just now I'm in no temper to entertain strangers."

"But at least," Cadwallader Hunter protested, "you mustn't look on me as a stranger, my dear fellow—and if there's anything I can do——"

"My dear fellow," Loveland flung back at him, in angry mimicry, "if you keep on, I'm more likely to look on you as a bore. The one thing you can do for me is to go, and take your newspaper friend with you. Good morning."

And the bear shot back into his den, banging the door.



"The one thing you can do for me is to go, and take your newspaper friend with you"

"The British Lion before his midday meal," remarked the representative of "New York Light." "Another minute, and he'd have snatched a free lunch—Kidd with Hunter Sauce! But serve me up on toast if he hasn't got sauce enough of his own."

"He comes of a hot-tempered family." Cadwallader Hunter explained his English relative.

"I should say they'd been hot ever since William the Conqueror," commented Mr. Kidd. "Good family to keep away from when you haven't got your gun. I forgot mine this morning."

But he had not forgotten his stylographic pen.

The moment that the door had slammed, Loveland's ears tingled with the consciousness that not only had he been guilty of a very rude act, but a particularly stupid one.

He had never liked Cadwallader Hunter, had lately grown tired and sick of him, and detested him cordially now, for a peppery second or two; yet all this did not do away with *noblesse oblige*. Nothing could excuse forgetfulness of one's obligation, the obligation to be a gentleman; and Loveland was irritably aware that he had forgotten it.

He reminded himself that a great liberty had been taken with him at an inopportune moment, that he was not used to having liberties taken with him at the best of times, and that Cadwallader Hunter deserved all he had got for coming up to him uninvited, with a stranger—a newspaper man—in tow. Still, Val was not happy, and if he had not been too stubbornly proud to yield to his first impulse, he would have flung open the door and run after his visitors with apologies. But no; he would not do it. A bad precedent to make with a person like Cadwallader Hunter, he said, excusing himself. The Major would take advantage of it; and as for the journalist, he—Lord Loveland—stood on purple heights so lofty that he need fear no spiteful yapping of dogs on lower levels. Nothing could drag him down to their depths; and as his idea was that American newspaper men were no slaves to truth, he told himself that this one would probably have lied in any case.

With such thoughts vaguely stirring in his mind, and assured that Cadwallader Hunter's past civility had been entirely for what he could get, Loveland tried to re-establish friendly relations with his own conscience; but the uneasy pricking would not stop. It drove him up and down, in and out of one beautifully furnished room to another, in irrepressible restlessness, and a presentiment of worse things to come than he had yet suffered.

He had meant, when his unpacking was done, to dress and lunch in the restaurant, whose fame had reached even the dining-room of the Guard's Club. But that was before the Nightmare. Now he did not want to look at his fellow-beings or be looked at; and he pressed his electric bell viciously to order luncheon sent up.

It came presently, and would have been delicious to a man without a grievance, but Loveland's grievance was so gigantic that it had crowded out his appetite; and scarcely knowing what he ate, he went through course after course, brooding on his wrongs, and pondering the chances of revenge.

Useless to waste money in cabling instructions for Foxham's arrest, he reflected. The wretch, who had planned everything so well, would long ago have taken himself out of harm's way, and it would be like setting Scotland Yard to look for a very small, rusty needle in a haystack as big as England and the Continent, to expect the thievish valet to be found. Months ago, in an expansive moment, when Loveland had nothing better to do than listen while his boots were being laced, Foxham had confessed that at one time he had been an actor, "in a humble way." His speciality had been quick disguises, "lightning changes"; and he had been successful in a "turn" done at provincial music halls. Loveland could imagine Foxham disguising himself very well, and being almost as good an actor as he had been a valet. He was perhaps masquerading now as a Salvation Army Preacher, or a Beauty Specialist; or setting up as a grocer on the money got by the betrayal of his master.

No, Loveland decided, he need not hope to punish Foxham. His time might be better employed in planning the reconstruction of his own wardrobe.

A man, even a Marquis, can live without tie pins or a change of shirt studs, but he cannot live without such clothes as Society expects of him. Loveland thought with almost passionate regret of his tailor's achievements, lost to him for ever, and with anxiety of the difficult matter it would be to replace them.

The hundred and fifty pounds represented by his letter of credit could not be spared for American tailors and bootmakers; that went without saying. These persons would have to trust him. But—were American tailors and bootmakers of a trusting nature? Loveland had somehow got the impression that they were not, and that even if you were a Duke—much less a Marquis—and flaunted a copy of Burke under their noses, they would still want some native millionaire to guarantee them against loss.

Cadwallader Hunter was not a millionaire (this was the one damaging statement he had voluntarily made against himself) but he knew millionaires and was known by them; and with a pang of selfish regret, even sharper than his first remorse, Loveland repented his wastefulness in throwing away such a friend. If he had not slammed the door almost upon Cadwallader Hunter's high, thin nose, he might now have summoned him by telephone, and have got him to trot about introducing the Marquis of Loveland to the best tailors in New York. Of course, the Major would not accept the snub as final: he was not that sort of person; but it was beneath the Loveland dignity to insult a man and then ask a favour of him. The only thing for Val to do was to wait until he had collected other friends more solid, more valuable, than Cadwallader Hunter, and as soon

as possible tell the tale of his misfortunes. Of course, everybody would be delighted to help Lord Loveland; and, by the way, there was Mr. Coolidge who could be approached, if worst came to worst.

But worst had not yet come to worst, and as Val's spirits rose with a mingling of good food and bright hopes, he decided against Coolidge as a refuge for the present. In spite of all, he would stick to his guns and not forgather further with the *Mauretania* people until he had seen what Harborough's letters produced. He could get on for a day or two, and meanwhile there were things to do.

When he had been cheered by luncheon, and soothed by cigarettes, he sent for a motor taxi-cab. The afternoon was still young, and so full of sparkle and gayety that life seemed worth living after all; therefore Lord Loveland had begun to value himself almost as highly as ever, by the time his smart little automobile pulled up in front of the bank.

It was a stately bank, well worthy of its London connection; and he handed in his visiting card and letter of credit, with the air of one entitled to receive unlimited sums. The cashier, however, having looked at him, the card, and the letter, did not appear to be impressed. Instead of replying in words to Loveland's demand for twenty pounds, he walked away with the letter of credit in his hand, and vanished behind a swing door. Loveland thought that he had probably gone to fetch the manager, who would perhaps desire to see in person a titled client of some importance. But after a short delay the cashier returned alone, and having strolled back to his place behind the grating, there stood silent for a moment.

"I'm rather in a hurry," said Loveland. "I suppose there'll be no red tape about my getting twenty pounds? I want it this afternoon."

The cashier smiled a dry smile, and his voice sounded dry as he answered. "I don't know about the red tape, but I'm sorry to tell you we have no instructions from London to pay."

"What?" cried Val, reddening with annoyance. Several people writing cheques or waiting for money at the counter, looked up and continued to look. "You have no instructions?"

"No instructions to pay," repeated the cashier, putting on the last word an emphasis which sounded offensive to Loveland's ears, though he hastily assured himself that it could not possibly have any such meaning.

"This is very inconvenient," said Val, to whom Bridge and tips on shipboard had left exactly seventeen shillings, three pence halfpenny.

"I'm sorry for that," remarked the cashier, still more formally, more unsympathetically, and—one might almost have said—more disrespectfully, than before.

Loveland, though inclined to storm, reflected a moment. He had intended to sail on the *Baltic*, which was due to leave English shores only yesterday, and might not arrive at New York for seven or eight days. He had not given anyone notice—not even his mother—that he had changed his intention, and very likely the London papers had paragraphed him as a passenger on the *Baltic's* next trip. Nevertheless, he could not quite understand how that fact excused his London bank's delay in instructing their New York correspondents. They had had plenty of time to arrange his affairs before his sudden departure in the *Mauretania*, and by not doing so they were likely to make him a great deal of unnecessary trouble.

Again he thought of Cadwallader Hunter. In this instance, too, the man might have been useful.

"Well, I don't see why I should be made to suffer because the London and Southern Bank puts off till tomorrow what it ought to have done a week ago," said Loveland, beginning to be arrogant, though looking boyish, with his flushed face, and his white scar glimmering on its background of clear, ruddy-brown. "I must have some money, you know."

The cashier did not reply to this challenge, and his eyes expressed no interested consideration of the matter.

"You had better see your manager and explain the circumstances," pursued Val.

"It would be useless. We could not pay without instructions."

"I daresay I might manage with ten pounds till you could get an answer, if you choose to be so ridiculously over-cautious," Loveland insisted, loftily. "But in that case you must cable at once."

"You will no doubt be willing to pay for the message in advance?" suggested the cashier.

"Certainly not," said Val, no longer trying to keep his temper under control. "You've seen my card. Isn't that enough for you?"

"Business is business," quoted the bank employé, still unruffled, still blind to Lord Loveland's importance, cold to his necessities.

"And decency's decency," stormed Val, careless now who looked or listened, and in a mood to wreck all American institutions.

"Yes, it's as well never to forget that," the cashier hinted, significantly. "Sorry we cannot accommodate you at present."

"I'm hanged if you ever get the chance again," retorted Val, snatching his letter of credit from the counter. "I shall myself send a cable to the London and Southern which will make you repent your pig-headedness." And with this ultimatum he strode to the door, as if on the way to sign a death-warrant.

"By his looks, that will be an expensive cable, and make the wire mighty hot," Val heard a man chuckle as he passed, and there was a spatter of laughter, which (for his eyes) painted the opposite sky-scrapers bright scarlet.

"Beastly America! Beastly Americans!" he muttered. "I suppose this is their way of resenting the existence of aristocracy."

Lord Loveland had a good deal to learn yet about America—and also about that important member of the aristocracy, himself.

As he returned to his motor cab, which had been "taxing" away violently since he left it, he wondered if he would have enough money to pay for it. But, what if he hadn't? He could tip the chauffeur, and the hotel would do the rest. Also the hotel would put down the cash for a dozen cablegrams. Oh, the sting of these pin-pricks would last no longer than the poison of mosquito-bites! Once Jim Harborough's friends began to rally round him, and vie among each other for his society, as the Mauretians had done, New York would be his to play with. Patience, then, and shuffle the cards. As he had heard someone say on shipboard, "Faint heart never won a game of poker."

It was thus he smoothed away the sulky frown which suited neither his face, nor the gentle Indian-summer sunshine. Then, trying to forget the first snub man had ever dared to deal him, he flashed here and there in his motor cab, making a house to house distribution of Jim's envelopes and his own visiting cards, according to home custom when armed with letters of introduction.

The sky flamed with sunset banners—Spanish colours—long before he had finished his round and was ready to return to the Waldorf. There, his idea of a suitable present to the chauffeur left him with the American equivalent of eight or nine shillings in his pocket. But, as he had expected, the hotel paid for his afternoon's motoring. So cheerfully did it pay that he sent off an unnecessarily long and extremely frank cablegram to his London bankers which they ought to receive on opening their doors next morning. He thought that it would rather wake them up, and that in consequence of their response to New York—certain to flash immediately along the wires—he would receive an apology from the rude wretch who had insulted him that afternoon. But nothing would induce him to forget or forgive. He had informed the London bankers that his business must be diverted into another channel, which they were invited to suggest.

When Loveland found himself alone again in his luxurious suite of rooms, with the November night coming on, and no amusement on hand (unless he chose to stare down from his high windows at the blaze of astonishing jewels which festooned the immense blue dusk with light and colour) he half wished once more that he had not been so cautious in the matter of accepting invitations. After all, it wouldn't have compromised his future, if he had gone to dine with the Coolidges, or Spanish-eyed, flirtatious Mrs. Milton and her gentle little daughter Fanny. A dinner with them—or even with the dullest people who had invited him—would have been preferable to an undiluted dose of his own society on this first night in a strange land. However, it was too late to reconsider now with dignity (though he was childishly confident that any of his American acquaintances would have been entranced, had he suddenly changed his mind) and the next best thing to dining with friends would be to watch the coming and going of gay New York in the Waldorf-Astoria restaurant.

He dressed and went down about eight, therefore, looking forward to the novelty of the unknown.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE DISCOVERY OF LORD LOVELAND BY AMERICA

It was a brilliant scene into the midst of which Loveland plunged.

Society begins to dine earlier in New York than in London; therefore at eight o'clock dinner was in full swing. There was scarcely an empty table; and many of the women being in hats and semi-evening dress, the red and gold restaurant suggested to the newcomer a living picture of Paris.

He had had the forethought to telephone down and order a table to be kept for him, and informing an interrogative waiter that he was Lord Loveland he learned that his place would be found at the far end of the room.

It looked a very far end indeed, gazing across an intervening sea of flowerlike hats, charming faces, and jewelled necks that glimmered white under film of lace and tulle; but Loveland was not shy. Among all the men who protected the charming faces, his sweeping, faintly supercilious glance did not show him one whose physical advantages he need envy. He rather enjoyed his progress, winding on and on along narrow paths between rose-burdened tables, with lovely eyes lifting to his as he passed by. He wondered if any pair of those eyes was destined to look down

his own table at Loveland Castle some day. Well, they should be beautiful eyes to deserve the honour! the thought slipped vaguely through his head, and then his own eyes brightened with the light of recognition.

There, at a large table decorated with white and purple violets, sat Elinor Coolidge, her father, Mrs. Milton and Fanny, and two men whom Loveland had never seen before. Standing, and bending slightly down to talk in a confidential tone with one of these men, was Major Cadwallader Hunter.

His back was turned towards Loveland, who recognised him instantly, however, by the set of his high, military shoulders, and the bald spot on his head which Lesley Dearmer had likened to the shape of Italy on the map. He seemed to listen with deep interest to what one of the seated men was saying, and then to chime in eagerly with some addition of his own. Everyone at the table was absorbed in the conversation between these two, and as Loveland came nearer, he saw that the expression of all the faces, including those of the three ladies, was so grave as to appear out of keeping with the liveliness of the scene. Suddenly, however, Loveland caught Fanny Milton's eye. She started, and blushed scarlet. The slight, involuntary movement she made drew Miss Coolidge's attention: and Elinor, seeing the direction in which Fanny's eyes were turned, sent a glance that way.

Loveland, within bowing distance now, met the glance, and returned it, smiling. He was annoyed that Cadwallader Hunter should be with the party, even though evidently not of it. Yet, after all, he said to himself, perhaps it was as well. He did not mean to apologise to Cadwallader Hunter, for he thought his own rudeness more or less justified by the liberty the other had taken; but he had already made up his mind that, the next time he met the man, he would act as if nothing disagreeable had happened. As to Cadwallader Hunter's readiness to snatch at the olive branch, Loveland had not the slightest doubt of it. He thought he had only to hold out a hand for the Major to kiss it, grovelling.

Elinor Coolidge did not blush at the sight of Lord Loveland as Fanny Milton did, but her beautiful face changed curiously. Its cameo-clear lines hardened, her lips were pressed together, and her large eyes narrowed, gleaming like topazes between their dark lashes, as the lights from the shaded candles on the table lighted sparks in their yellow-brown depths.

The thought flashed into Loveland's head that the quick change in her face meant jealousy of Fanny Milton. He had noticed more than once on shipboard that she had seemed jealous of Fanny, and now that deep blush of the younger girl's at sight of him, had probably vexed her. He could not attribute the hardening of the beautiful features to any other cause, and as of the two it was wise to prefer Elinor and her millions to Fanny and her thousands, he let his first look, his first words, be for the Coolidges, father and daughter.

"How d'you do?" he asked, pausing at the table.

Instead of answering, or putting out her hand to him as he expected, Elinor almost convulsively grasped the sticks of a delicate little fan which lay beside her plate. She shot a topaz glance at one of the two new men, then let her eyes under raised brows seek and hold her father's.

Lord Loveland was at once surprised and puzzled by this extraordinary reception. "Can Cadwallader Hunter have told them all some lie to set them against me?" he asked himself. But it was no more than a passing thought. It was incredible that Miss Coolidge should believe anything against him.

At the sound of Loveland's voice, Cadwallader Hunter straightened up in haste and turned round, looking suddenly stiff and wicked as a frozen snake.

He stared into Loveland's eyes, his own like grey glass; and an unpromising smile depressed the corners of his thin lips.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" thought Val, with the carelessness of a man used to dominating situations. "He's afraid I'm not going to speak to him, and he daren't speak first for fear of being snubbed again. Well"—and Val felt pleasantly magnanimous—"I'll give him a lead. How are you?" he asked, with the patronising tone his voice unconsciously took when he spoke to this man.

Then he could hardly believe his eyes which told him that Cadwallader Hunter had turned a contemptuous shoulder upon him, darting disgust in a venomous glance.

"This is the—person we were speaking of," he said to the dark, clean-shaven man towards whom he had been bending (he seemed always to be bending towards someone) when Loveland came up. "Shall we have him turned out?"

Mr. Coolidge half rose in his seat, losing his characteristic stolidity. "No, no," he returned, in a low, decided voice, "there must be no scene here, for the ladies' sake. Keep quiet, everybody."

"You're right, Coolidge," returned the dark, smooth-faced man.

Then the latter fixed his eyes on Loveland with a stare under a frown; and the other new man stared also; but the three women looked away, trying in vain to think of something easy and natural to say to each other. A slight, nervous twitching which occasionally disturbed the tranquillity of Mrs. Milton's camellia-white face became visible; Elinor Coolidge was pale and motionless; and Fanny's eyes swam in a lake of tears which she struggled to keep from over-

flowing.

Again it struck Loveland that he was living in a dream; the gorgeous room; the crowd of well-dressed men and beautiful women; the hurrying waiters; the lights; the fragrance of flowers and food, and scented laces; the chatter of laughing voices subdued by distance; and more unreal than all, the table surrounded by the faces that he knew, faces he had expected to find smiling in friendship, now frozen into something like horror—horror at him, Lord Loveland, whom everybody had always wanted and admired.

It could not be true. It was not happening really. Things like this did not happen.

He stood for a moment, stupidly, like a boy in the school-room who has been bidden to stand up and be stared at as a punishment for some misdemeanour. He was almost inclined to laugh at the insolence of Cadwallader Hunter, as a lion might laugh at a fox terrier worrying his foot. It was on his lips to say, "What a tempest in a tea-pot! Surely you're not going to believe any idiotic tale that tuft-hunting ass may have trumped up about me?"

But he bit back the words. If they chose to champion Cadwallader Hunter in his silly grievance against a Marquis of Loveland, why, let them. They would be sorry afterwards—when it was too late. To sneer Cadwallader Hunter down as he deserved would be to make a disagreeable scene, and the business was squalid enough already. He would have thought better of the Coolidges, if not of the Miltons, mother and daughter; but he said to himself that none of them were worth even the shrug of the shoulders he gave, as with his head held gallantly high, he passed on towards his own table.

The little dramatic episode, if observed by any audience, had been played too subtly to be understood by those not concerned. Those seated nearest might have seen that, when a handsome young man stopped to speak to some members of a party at a table, another man who did not belong to that party, had looked at him scornfully and whispered venomously; that then one or two others had spoken hurriedly, and that the handsome young man had stalked away apparently in disgust.

But several of the neighbours knew the party at the table by sight, and Cadwallader Hunter also. These consulted together, and wondered who was the tall young man who looked like an Englishman. The women commented flatteringly upon his face or his figure, but the men were of the opinion that, judging by the way Cadwallader Hunter ("Pepys Junior" they called him) had eyed the chap he must be the rankest kind of an outsider.

There were two chairs at Loveland's table—placed in case he might choose to bring a guest—and he deliberately selected the one which put him with his back to the Coolidge party. But he had forgotten that Major Cadwallader Hunter was not one of that party, and might wander at will to any part of the dining-room. Presently he did begin to wander, stopping to talk with another group of people, then with another, and so on, always on his way somewhere else.

Loveland, utterly sick now of his late friend, did not bestow a glance upon the thin, high-shouldered figure as it paused and flitted, flitted and paused, like a fastidious bee in a flower-garden. A polite waiter had slipped a menu into the hand of Loveland, who regarded the decorated square of cardboard as if it were a fetish to preserve him from evil. But if he had deigned to let his eye follow Cadwallader Hunter, he would have seen that each group of people glanced with furtive curiosity at him; stared, whispered, stared again, and afterwards signalled each other from table to table, across flowery spaces, lifting eyebrows and exchanging signs of a secret intelligence.

Cadwallader Hunter prided himself on knowing all the people who were worth knowing, wherever he went, and those he did not know at the start, he generally contrived to know at the finish. He had at least twenty or thirty acquaintances in the restaurant of the Waldorf-Astoria tonight; and having heard from one of these a startling piece of news (which would have been less welcome yesterday) he dropped bits of the rich honey-pollen here and there, as he made his way towards the door. He had dined early, because he had been minded to show himself, rather late, at the first performance of a new comedy by the brilliant young playwright, Sidney Cremer; but now he found himself appearing on the stage and acting almost a leading part in a drama a hundred times more exciting than he could see at any theatre. He went straight from the restaurant to the long row of desks in the hotel office for a heart to heart talk with the clerk he had interviewed in the morning. Then, having made the impression and obtained the assurance he desired, he searched for other acquaintances in that vast, decorative corridor of marble, facetiously known as "Peacock Alley." He knew several of the best Peacocks there (for there were all kinds, from North, South, West and East, to many of whom Cadwallader Hunter would not have deigned to bow, even if they were smeared with gold and dipped in diamonds), and he talked to those of his choice more loudly than he had talked in the dining-room. Acquaintances whom he button-holed, and strangers who could catch the drift of what he was saying—listened with interest, and then sat or stood about with the air of expecting that some exciting event might happen.

Meanwhile Loveland ordered his dinner, though not quite as carefully as he would had it not been for the disagreeable little incident which he tried to forget as if it were but one more in the series of pin-pricks. As he had no money—at present—to pay for it, he thought he might as well drown his vexations in champagne, and asked for a bottle of the brand he liked best, without even enquiring the New York conception of its price.

As the waiter would have gone off with the order, Val called him back, on a sudden thought. "Do you know the names of the people at the table where I stopped?"

"Yes, sir," replied the man. "They are very well known here. We often have them dining and lunching. Mr. Coolidge is a millionaire. He and his daughter are just back from Europe, and Mrs. and Miss Milton, too."

"Yes, yes," said Loveland, impatiently. "I know all that. But the others?"

"Oh, the smooth shaved gentleman with the black hair and prominent eyes, he's Mr. Milton, Mrs. Milton's husband, rather a gay sort of gentleman, sir. The story is, he and Mrs. Milton don't get along very pleasantly. There'll be plenty here tonight will be interested, seeing them together just after her coming home with the young lady. And the other gentleman, sir, the good-looking, young one with the dark moustache, that's one of our greatest New York swells, Mr. Henry van Cotter. He——"

"Thank you. That will do," broke in Loveland, suddenly annoyed by the servant's knowing loquacity. The name of Henry van Cotter had, in such a connection, stirred a dim sense of discomfort within him. This van Cotter was one of Harborough's friends. Val had left Jim's letter, and a visiting card this afternoon at a huge palace of an "apartment house," where Mr. van Cotter had a flat.

The waiter, thus checked, trotted away with the order for dinner, and was so long in returning that Val (who did not see him stopped and harangued by a grave-faced superior) wondered and grew impatient. Other people were served, while he still sat idle. He was not hungry, for an angry tingling in his veins had burnt up his appetite for dinner, as his keenness for luncheon had been destroyed, but he resented being kept waiting, as if he were a person of no importance.

At last he saw his waiter coming back, and was about to ask irritably whether the man thought it was tomorrow's breakfast he'd ordered, when a sealed envelope of the hotel paper was laid on the table in place of the expected oysters.

The servant discreetly retired out of sight behind his lordship's chair, like a little boy who has lit a squib and awaits the explosion; and Loveland tore open the envelope which, very oddly, he thought, was not addressed.

He had a vague expectation that the contents would prove to be a note from Cadwallader Hunter, and the reality came upon him as a complete surprise.

"Sir," he read, in neat typing, "the management of the hotel presents its compliments, and informs you that the suite you are occupying will be required from this evening, also that they regret they have no other room to place at your disposal. They therefore enclose your account up to date, and request the favour of immediate payment. Should you wish for dinner and wine, they would be obliged if you would kindly pay in advance. The bill for same (as ordered by you) is enclosed separately from the other account."

Now, surely, he would at last wake up from this wild nightmare, and find himself at home in England, or still on the ship. Nothing had seemed real since he landed, and could not be real. Foxham could not have stolen his clothes; the New York bank could not have refused to give him money; Cadwallader Hunter could not have induced Henry van Cotter, the Coolidges and Miltons to cut him; and, above all, the hotel he honoured with his patronage could not have flung in his face this monstrous insult.

Nevertheless, there was the bill staring up at him, as he stared down at it.

Private Parlour, bedroom and bath	\$ 75.00
Luncheon served à la carte in parlour	\$ 6.50
Wine	\$ 5.00
Cablegram sent to London & Southern bank	\$ 10.50
Hire of Automobile three hours	\$ 15.00
	—
Total	\$ 122.00
Dinner, as ordered, and to be paid in advance	\$ 8.50
Champagne	\$ 10.00

Lord Loveland, hardly knowing what he said or did in the persistent nightmare from which he could not wake, called the waiter to him, from ambush behind his chair.

The man came, with eyes cast patiently down, not to meet the angry blaze turned dangerously upon him. He knew that something was wrong, very wrong, indeed, but it was not his affair, except that he was consumed with honest curiosity, and he did not wish grievances to be visited on him.

"There must be some mistake here," said Loveland, folding up the paper, and replacing the three sheets in the envelope, with fingers that were not quite steady. "This can't be for me. You see, there's no name on the thing. You've brought it to the wrong person."

"No—o, sir," returned the servant. "I was told to bring it to you. If there's a mistake, sir, it isn't

me who's made it."

"Very well, then, somebody else has," insisted Loveland. "I tell you this can't possibly be meant for me. Give the envelope back to whoever gave it to you, and ask him to hand it to the manager, saying that in error it was delivered to Lord Loveland."

"Yes, sir." The waiter obediently took charge of the offensive envelope, and ambled away with it, to confer at a distance with the person from whom it had been received five minutes ago. There were a few gestures, a few shrugs, and then the two approached Lord Loveland's table together.

"It's quite right, sir," murmured the newcomer. "The letter *is* for you, sir. There's no mistake." As if by way of reminder he gently laid the envelope down on the table, in the place where those iced Blue Points never would be now.

Deadly white under his brown tan, Val rose without a word, crumpling the envelope in a hand that itched to clutch someone by the throat, and flinging down a silver dollar for the waiter. The Coolidges and their party were still at the violet-decked table as Loveland passed by, but he did not see them. He had forgotten their existence.

"Papa, the Major *has* done it!" exclaimed Elinor Coolidge, looking across at her father, who sat between Mrs. Milton and Fanny.

"Yes, he has done it," replied Mr. Coolidge, smiling the wooden smile which was of fair, carved ivory when reproduced on the beautiful face of his daughter. "I don't know what's come over the Major since this morning. He seemed to love that Englishman like a son, on board the *Mauretania*; but tonight he fairly jumped out of himself with joy when he heard Van Cotter's piece of news."

"I'm sure we were all as nice as we could be to Lord—to *him*," faltered Fanny Milton, who had drained the lake from her eyes when no one was looking, but only to make way, it seemed, for a new supply of salt water.

"Oh, speak for yourself, Fanny," said Mrs. Milton, with her exaggerated English accent. "As for me, I——"

"Why, Mamma, you were just *lovely* to him, every minute!" cried the girl, defending herself briskly. "If you weren't married, with a grown-up daughter, people might have thought you were in love with him yourself, sometimes."

"Nonsense!" retorted Fanny's mother, darting a furious look at her child. "The way you talk shows you're *not* grown up."

"I always thought he was the most conceited young man I ever saw," broke in Elinor Coolidge. "I could have boxed his ears often, and it would have served him right. I just enjoy this. It's like a play."

"Well, I think that's real mean of you, Elinor," said Fanny. "And I don't see how you can feel that way. He looks so pale—it makes me sick to think what he's got to go through, poor fellow, and he's so handsome! Did you ever see anything as beautiful as he looked just now when he went stalking by us with his head high, and his face pale, and his eyes like blue fire?"

"I certainly never saw a British 'Lord' as handsome. They don't make 'em like that," said good-looking Henry van Cotter; and then they all laughed—all except Fanny Milton. She was wondering what Lesley Dearmer would do, if she were here tonight, instead of tearing away towards Louisville as fast as an express train could carry her. Lesley had been Loveland's friend, in quite an unpretending, humble little way, knowing that she was no match for him, and never could be. But Lesley was a strange girl. She thought of such odd, original things to do. Would she do anything odd and original if she were here now? And if she did, would it be for or against the man who was down?

As it happened, Lesley was thinking of Lord Loveland at that very moment. Perhaps it was a kind of telepathy which brought her image so clearly before Fanny Milton's eyes; for Lesley's thoughts included Fanny.

It was not yet time for the coloured porters to begin "making down" the beds in the sleeping cars, and Lesley and her aunt sat opposite one another, each with a book in her hand. Mrs. Loveland had a story of the South, as she could dimly remember it, before the Civil War, and she was reading with interest half sad, half pleased. Lesley had a novel, too, one which had been making quite a sensation while she was in Europe, and her aunt had bought it for her in the Grand Central Station, before taking the train. She had often said that she would like to read the book, but now, though her eyes travelled from one line to another, and she mechanically turned a page here and there, she did not even know the names of the characters, or what they were saying or doing.

The panting of the great engine and the rushing roar of the wheels had come to have a refrain for her. "Never again—never again," she heard them say, as if the words were shouted spitefully into her ears. "Never see him again—never again. He'll forget you—forget you. Soon he'll marry—marry some rich girl."

Then she wondered who the rich girl would be. Elinor Coolidge, perhaps? Elinor was very rich, and very beautiful, and already very proud. Everything about her was superlative. A great many glowing descriptive adjectives were called for, when one only thought about Elinor, and Lesley's experience as a story-writer had made her expert with adjectives—painfully expert, it seemed now, as her imagination ran ahead—even ahead of the rushing train—to picture Elinor as a bride.

"Oh, I'm sure she wouldn't make him happy!" Lesley thought, and then asked herself whether Lord Loveland deserved to be happy.

No, of course he didn't deserve happiness with a girl he married for money. Yet Lesley couldn't bear to think of him as miserable or disappointed in life. The brilliant sparks which showered past the train windows seemed to her like the moments she had spent with Loveland, moments left behind for ever now, and she could not help wishing that she might live them over again.

"Perhaps I might have helped him to be different, if I'd tried," she said to herself, as she watched the specks of fire which flashed and died. "But I *didn't* try. I was too proud to try, I suppose. It was a silly kind of pride, for he could be—he could be such a *man*, if he knew himself, and would live up to himself."

Elinor could not help him to do that. She was not the kind of girl to dream of the existence of that real self, of which Lesley had fancied she caught glimpses sometimes, as if behind a veil that never had been torn aside. Miss Coolidge would be well enough satisfied with Lord Loveland as he was, for she would only want from him material things, such things as she could afford to buy with her money. And if they married, the bright loveableness in Val's nature would be clouded and obscured. He would grow hard, and wholly selfish.

But with Fanny Milton, if he should marry her?

It was just as Lesley asked herself this question, that Fanny's thoughts flew to Lesley, wondering what Lesley would do if she saw Lord Loveland held up to public scorn.

"Fanny would love him," Lesley reflected. "But——" Her mind paused at that "But," and she took herself to task for mean jealousy because it was in her head, or her heart, that Fanny would not love him in the way best for his highest development. "She'd spoil and pet him, and make him worse than he is now, because it's a strong tonic, not a diet of sugar that he needs. And if he said a cross word, or looked at another woman, Fanny would cry."

Although Lesley knew that all this was true, still she was afraid that jealousy of a girl looked upon by Lord Loveland as eligible, was really the foundation of her argument.

"I *am* jealous," she admitted, "although I have no right to be. I could have made him care enough about me to lose his head and say that if I'd promise to marry him, he'd count the world well lost. Oh, yes, I could have done that! I know it. But how would he have felt, the minute the words were out of his mouth? He'd have regretted them bitterly, and thought himself mad. Then, even if I'd said 'no'—which I would have said, of course,—he'd have thought forever with a kind of wild horror of the narrow escape he'd had, and all his memory of me would have been spoiled. Oh, I'm glad, glad, I kept it to friendship from first to last, and laughed at him always! I told him that he'd forget, and that I wanted him to forget; but I don't, and he won't. Just because we were friends, and because I laughed, and was different from the others, he'll remember—even years from now, when he's married, and the world has given him all it can."

Of course Lesley ought not to have been glad that Loveland would remember her as the one dear blessing he had been denied, and think of her when it would be more suitable that he should be thinking of his Marchioness; but she was glad, with a kind of fierce gladness that hurt, and made her young face look strained in the crude white light of the sleeping-car.

"Dear me, Lesley, that must be an exciting book!" complained Aunt Barbara. "I've spoken to you twice without your hearing."

"I'm so sorry, dear," said Lesley.

"What's it about?" asked the elder woman, who had dutifully put away her novel, because it had occurred to her that it was time to go to bed.

"About?" echoed Lesley. "Oh—about love. And marrying the wrong people."

"What a pity!" sighed Aunt Barbara. "I do think stories ought all to end well, don't you?"

"Some can't," said the girl. "It wouldn't be for the best, I suppose, if they did."

"You look tired, dear," said Mrs. Loveland. "How happy and peaceful we shall feel when we're at home again."

"I wonder?" answered Lesley. But she whispered the words too softly for Aunt Barbara to hear.

CHAPTER TWELVE

EXIT LORD LOVELAND

Loveland walked out of the dining-room of the Waldorf-Astoria hardly knowing what he meant to do.

His wish was to punish those who had insulted him; but how?—was the question ringing in his brain. A gentleman could not knock down a management, or punch its head. "A Management" seemed intangible, out of reach.

Val's first thought was to march up to the desk, and "have a row" with somebody, but an instant's reflection showed him that it would be more in accordance with dignity to go to his own quarters and command a representative of the "Management" to come to him.

This resolve he carried out. Having reached his room, and called down through the telephone for the manager, he was not kept waiting long before a gentlemanly, middle-aged person appeared at his sitting-room door.

"Are you the manager of this hotel?" Loveland enquired brusquely.

"I represent the manager," the newcomer returned.

"Very well, then," said Loveland. "I want you to tell me the meaning of this." And he indicated the typewritten letter and the two bills, which he had laid conspicuously on the table.

The man scarcely glanced at the papers, about which he was evidently well informed already. "The meaning is, that unfortunately we're obliged to request that you vacate this suite immediately," he replied.

"Then, this notice is actually intended for me?"

"It certainly is."

"Why were the rooms let to me this morning if they were wanted tonight?"

"That I can't say. I only know they are wanted."

"Suppose I refuse to go?"

"Oh, I guess you won't do that."

"You're right," said Val. "I wouldn't stop here now if you paid *me* twelve times as much as you want me to pay *you*. And, by the way—I can't pay tonight. You'll have to wait till tomorrow, when I can get to the—er—bank."

"I'm afraid we can't wait," the other answered quickly. "If you aren't able to pay we shall have to keep your baggage till you do."

Loveland stared. "That's a little too steep, isn't it?" he sneered. "You turn me out of your hotel in the most insulting and unprovoked manner, and then expect me to go somewhere else without my luggage. Are these American manners with foreigners?"

"They have to be, with some foreigners," returned the other, smiling mysteriously.

"I intend to go now, whether you like or not," said Val, "and take my luggage with me."

"You can't take it unless you pay your bill. That's the law, and our police know how to enforce it. If I were you I wouldn't do anything to make it necessary to call the police. Once in their hands, you might be quite a while getting out, you know."

Loveland clenched his hands, to keep from striking this mouth-piece of the "Management." He would not be drawn into a vulgar brawl, as a preface to his New York campaign in search of an heiress. Things had begun badly enough, as they were, but nothing had happened yet at which he might not be able to laugh—rather bitterly perhaps—tomorrow. He had heard of horrors in connection with the New York police; innocent British visitors arrested and kept for days in gaol, for some offence never committed; the newspapers printing lies about them, to be copied in London, and read by their shocked acquaintances. Such things he had been told, and though they mightn't be true, Loveland could not afford to risk any such incident for himself. He was far too important.

It seemed to him that there was a peculiar significance, almost a menace, in the hint he had just been given. If he were a criminal escaping from justice, instead of a British peer with a proud name which he would willingly bestow on a daughter of America, just such an emphasis might have been used to warn him that he had better bear the ills he knew, if he did not want to incur worse evils.

Val believed that Cadwallader Hunter had somehow contrived to bring about this hideous state of affairs; though he could not imagine how, unless all Americans were ready to band together and avenge one another's fancied wrongs against a stranger. On the face of it, nothing could be more ridiculous than to suppose that an Englishman of title was being asked to leave a New York hotel in the evening, because he had been a little rude to a retired Major and a newspaper man, in the morning. Yet, for his life, Loveland could think of no other reason; and his polite but cold companion did not seem inclined to explain, unless in answer to undignified entreaties.

"My luggage is worth a lot more than what I owe you here," he said.

"We have heard all about that luggage," was the meaning reply.

Val bit his lip. For the moment he had forgotten Foxham's treachery, but he remembered it now with recurring rage. Evidently the valet had poured forth the history of the great unpacking episode.

Lord Loveland made no retort to the innuendo, for he was busy with a mental calculation. His sole worldly possessions in America consisted of the things he had had in use on board ship. The luggage itself was old, though good of its kind; and the silver fittings in his suit-case would not fetch much if sold. As for his watch, it was a mere cheap, stop-gap affair of gun-metal, bought to tide over the interval until he could redeem the gold repeater he had rashly pawned in London. The studs and sleeve-links that he was wearing were the poorest in his collection. They had been Foxham's choice for the voyage, not his; and now he understood Foxham's underlying motive.

"In my opinion we shall be lucky if the sale of your effects covers the bill," calmly went on the representative of the "Management."

"I wouldn't advise your people to try and sell my things!" exclaimed Loveland.

"They will wait the customary length of time."

"They'd better be jolly careful what they do," Loveland broke out. "Anyhow, I'm much mistaken if I haven't a case in law against the hotel already. If I have—and in justice I ought to have—I shall proceed."

The other smiled for the first time. "I don't expect that any of us will lie awake nights worrying," said he.

Loveland tried to crush the man with a look, but he was not to be so easily abashed. "I've said all I want to say now," Val informed him icily. "You can go, and I will give up the rooms when I'm ready."

"That's all right, as long as it's inside half an hour," returned the other, still with unruffled politeness. "But I have to stay till you do give them up."

"Why this fondness for my society?" enquired Loveland, with raised eyebrows.

The man smiled with a certain good-natured perception of the humour in the situation. "It's duty keeps me as much as pleasure," said he.

"Welcome the coming, speed the parting guest, eh? This hotel seems to follow that rule with a vengeance. But I'll take the will for the deed. Strange as it may seem" (Loveland was enjoying his own sarcasm) "I *want* you to go."

"Very sorry I can't oblige you."

"Confound you, do you think I'll set the place on fire the minute your back is turned?"

"Not so much that as—there are other things you might do."

"What other things? Really I should like to know, for the sake of curiosity."

"Well, if you're bound to get it out of me, I've got to stay and see you don't remove any articles of value."

"By Jove! So that's it? My own, or yours?"

"What's yours is ours at present, and what's ours is our own—as the bride said to the bridegroom."

Val could almost have laughed, though not at the joke. He—the Marquis of Loveland, an officer in the Grenadier Guards—was to be watched lest he should steal the hotel soap, or sneak off with his own toothbrush!

He went white and red, and white again. If by a word he could have tumbled the whole hotel down in an earthquake, he would have been willing to be caught under the ruins. He had a wild, boyish conviction that by subjecting himself now to the extremest inconvenience, he could by and by cause the hotel management poignant remorse. Yes, he would take them at their word. He would walk out of the house just as he was, leaving everything he had behind him. This would make their guilt the blacker when it came to be brought up against them, as it would be very soon, probably as soon as tomorrow. Then they would seek him out, and crawl in apology, begging him to come back at any price, or at no price. But nothing would induce him to cross the threshold of the Waldorf-Astoria again, no, not even if every member of the staff grovelled at his feet. He would not even take his overcoat, and if he were struck down with pneumonia, so much the worse for these insolent people. As for himself, he did not care what happened. He felt as he had when a little boy, and some tutor of unusual firmness had dared to reproach him or attempt punishment. At such times he had wished that he might instantly die, or at the least, fall in a fit, for the sake of frightening his cruel persecutor.

His cap (his only head-covering, as he had forgotten a bowler on board ship) lay on a table, and he held it out for the enemy's inspection. "You say all that is mine is yours," he sneered. "This may have cost six or seven shillings when it was new. Now it would fetch two at most. I will pay you for it. Half a crown is the least I have. Pray, keep the change."

He laid a coin—his last large coin—down on the table where the cap had been, and without another word walked nonchalantly out of the room.

The gentlemanly man did not follow to protest, or to offer the overcoat, as Val half fancied he would do. And without stopping to think coherently, Loveland passed by the lift, scorning to take advantage of its convenience, and ran down flight after flight of stairs, his blood drumming in his ears.

A red cloud before his eyes seemed to screen him from the world. Below, in the great hall through which he had to pass on his way out of the hotel, lights glared and dazzled, and the talk and laughter of many persons sounded in his ears like the evil voices of the Black Stones that beset Arabian Nights' travellers on their way to the Singing Tree and the Golden Water.

Loveland pushed on, blindly, conscious of himself as the one real entity in a crowd of Will o' the Wisps, and wicked lure-lights. His sole concern with the people in the hateful, glaring picture, was that they should suspect nothing of his feelings. He walked with his head up and something that he meant for a smile on his lips; nor was it an affectation that he appeared to recognize no one, though Cadwallader Hunter—who had been waiting to see this exit—believed it to be.

The Major was standing almost in Loveland's path, speaking with a lady whose name had been on one of Jim Harborough's envelopes, and as the tall Englishman came towards him, he deliberately turned his back.

"Sic semper milordibus," he said half aloud. Which far-fetched witticism made the lady laugh.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

SHADOWS

The night was warm for November in New York; still, there was a decided crispness in the air which Loveland felt as he went out.

The streets were brilliant with light, and half New York appeared to be abroad, although the theatres had been in full swing for nearly an hour. But all the women wore cloaks, and the men overcoats. Loveland, in his dinner jacket and wide expanse of shirt front, his pumps and silk stockings, his cloth travelling cap pulled over his eyes, would have been noticeable even if his height and good looks had not made him a marked figure. Everybody who passed stared, and more than a few glanced back at him. Here and there some pretty woman laughed at a joking comment whispered by her escort; and when his first hot rage began to cool, it was uncomfortably borne in upon Loveland that he was the observed of many observers.

Like most Englishmen, he loathed being conspicuous, and in his present plight it was especially hateful, since being conspicuous meant also to be ridiculous.

His ears, shut by anger, were opened by vanity, and he heard a woman say to a man that he "looked as if he'd just been turned down by his best girl." "And kicked out by Pa," added her companion; at which they both giggled, and the tingling in Loveland's veins drove out the chill which had begun to creep in.

He longed to call a cab, and hide himself from staring eyes, but he had scarcely a shilling left. There was nothing to do but walk on, until he found some hotel which would take him in on trust. As his brain cooled, he began to realise that it might be difficult to find any such hotel.

Here he was, on a winter's night, a foreigner in a strange city, walking the streets without an overcoat, and with only a coin or two in his pocket. He remembered that, in the afternoon, when dealing out visiting cards and letters of introduction, he had slipped his cardcase into a pocket of his overcoat, where it still remained. That overcoat remained in one of the rooms lately his at the Waldorf-Astoria. What a fool he had been after all to leave it behind. The watcher could hardly have torn it off his back. As it was, a whim of silly pride had deprived him of a means of identification, as well as a decent protection for his body.

Why should a hotel-keeper consent to take him in, without luggage, and with nothing save his bare word—not even a bit of engraved pasteboard—to prove that he was the Marquis of Loveland? He had never put himself mentally in the place of anything so low down in the social scale as the keeper of a hotel; yet instinctively he performed the feat now, and judged the case against his own interests.

Nevertheless, as he did not wish to prowl about New York all night, he could but try his luck. Meeting a policeman, he enquired for a respectable, inexpensive hotel in a quiet street, not too far away; and did his best to look unconscious of the big man's concentrated gaze fixed on the large white oval of his shirt front.

"Yez might try the New House, on Toyty Thoyd Street," was the advice that followed upon reflection; and Loveland was obliged to ask three times before he was able to translate "Toyty Thoyd" into Thirty-third Street. Then, he had to turn and retrace his steps, for he had been wandering uptown, and must have covered some distance, as he guessed by the length of time it

took him to reach the Waldorf-Astoria again. Coming near, so that the huge building loomed above him like a mountain flaming on all its heights, he was tempted to cross to the other side of the street; but, ashamed of the impulse as childish, he marched stolidly ahead, and even forced himself to turn his face towards the brilliant square of the door-way. As the light caught and photographed him in passing, a man who had been standing in front of the hotel under the iron canopy, with the air of waiting for someone, started after Loveland, walking just fast enough to keep him well in sight.

Val turned into Thirty-third Street, and stopped before the New House, which advertised itself in a blaze of starry electric letters. The man on his trail smiled as he saw the tall figure in evening dress hesitate for an instant, and then hurl himself at a revolving door. He himself strolled on, but he did not go far. When he had taken a dozen steps he wheeled, passed the hotel again, took a dozen more steps, and again came back.

He was a short man, with square shoulders, a large, close-cropped black head set on a short neck into which a double chin bulged, as if he had swallowed a sponge, and it had stuck in his throat as it expanded. His hair glittered like a thick coat of black varnish, and his black eyes glittered also. They looked out from under heavy lids which pouched underneath, and were set too close on either side of a well-cut nose. He was clean shaven, thus making the most of his best feature, a mouth which was handsome despite the hard lines that deep draughts from the cup of life had traced round it. The man was well dressed, with a white silk scarf protecting his evening shirt from the sealskin lining of his overcoat, and he looked not only successful but confident of success. Yet there was anxiety and nervous excitement in the flash of his eyes towards the door of the hotel, each time he passed and repassed.

It was when he had just taken his sixth turn that Loveland shot out through the revolving door even more suddenly than he had shot in. The watcher was near enough to see the look on his face—the tenseness of the lips and drawing together of the eyebrows—and his own expression said "I thought so!" as plainly as words—if there had been anyone there to read it. But Loveland was entirely absorbed in himself, and in bitter thoughts of the hateful experience he had just gone through. He did not notice the man who lingered not far away, and the few people passing had no idea that a little drama was being enacted in pantomime under their eyes. They all looked at the tall young Englishman without an overcoat, but they did not connect the other man with him.

It was hardly to be hoped that there would be a room disengaged in a hotel for a nervous young gentleman with an exposed white shirt-front, no luggage, and a missing cardcase. When Val had explained that he was Lord Loveland, just landed from England, the hotel clerk turned away to hide either a yawn or a grin, and seemed no more inclined to remember the existence of an unoccupied bedroom than if his client had been plain Mr. Smith or Mr. Jones.

"We had a gentleman from England here last week," he said, pleasantly. "His name was Walker, London. Sorry we can't accommodate your lordship."

Then Loveland had squared his shoulders and marched out into the night, which seemed by now grimly cold and unfriendly. The very stars had a sarcastic twinkle, as if they glimmered down from their safe, comfortable heights and laughed.

Val was not inclined to try any more hotels. He felt very young in his loneliness and humiliation, and his heart yearned wistfully for the shabby Scotch shooting-box where his mother lived and thought long thoughts of her. The snow that had fallen so coldly outside her windows seemed warmer than these stars that with their sparkling embroidery canopied a strange land; and the sparsely furnished rooms of the lodge were more beautiful in his remembrance than the gorgeous suite at the Waldorf-Astoria.

His mother grudged herself comforts for his sake, yet she had a fire. Val generally pictured her in autumn and winter, bending towards the glow of the rosy flames, holding out her beautifully shaped hands to their kisses. He would be thankful to share the warmth of that fire now; and the faint scent of burning peat—cheapest fuel!—as it stole fragrantly into his memory, gave him a horrid twinge of homesickness such as he had never felt, even in South Africa; for he had had friends around him in the war days.

When he had been in Scotland last—on that flying visit which began with good advice and ended with pink pearls—he had complained of the cooking.

He thought of that, too, at this moment, and laughed a little to himself. He would have been very glad of a chance to taste some of that Scotch broth which he had discarded because it was too thick and too salt. He was sharply hungry; and this hunger gnawed with a wicked persistence it had lacked in South Africa, because in those stirring times it had been shared by all alike, merrily, with jokes.

Yes, he was hungry, sickeningly hungry; and he did not see any prospect of satisfying his appetite that night, unless he should tear the gold sleeve-links out of his shirtcuffs to offer humbly in some cheap restaurant in exchange for a meal. They were not worth much intrinsically; but the thought of the cuffs denuded, ignominious, and the picture of himself—metaphorically—swallowing the buttons like a conjurer, so revolted his fastidious imagination, that he snatched at an alternative, almost any alternative. So it was that, when something which his mother would have called an inspiration floated nebulously through his head, Loveland welcomed it as an astronomer welcomes a new star.

He remembered hearing Betty or Jim Harborough say that in American towns a man might call upon a family he knew well, up to the hour of ten in the evening. It was not nearly ten yet, and though there was no family in New York whom Val knew well, it was a case of any port in a storm.

The Coolidges were now out of the running, and the Miltons; but a Mr. and Mrs. Beverly, with a daughter, had (half apologetically) invited him to visit at their house in Park Avenue. They were rich or richish, though with a trail of trade behind them, and the girl was pretty or prettyish. She seemed positively beautiful to the hungry and homeless Loveland, as the vision of her face lightened the cloud of his misery, and he would have been almost ready to pledge his future to Miss Beverly for a mess of pottage in the way of a kindly welcome, a dinner, a bed, and money in hand for the letter of credit.

He had cannily refused the invitation, pleading many engagements difficult to keep if visiting (the same formula had answered several hospitable offers), but he could easily explain the late call, by lightly recounting the story of his misfortune, making a jest of it, and throwing himself on the family's mercy. He hoped and believed that they would insist upon his staying all night in their house, also that a loan sufficient to pay his hotel bill and redeem his luggage might be suggested.

The prospect of release from all his woes was so soothing, and apparently so easy to compass, that the mere thought was a warming cordial. Val walked briskly back into Fifth Avenue, and asked the way of the first man he met.

The man was amiable, and Loveland felt an impulse of gratitude towards him for lucid and fluent explanations. After all, some of these Americans had very agreeable manners!

Val found Park Avenue a dignified street, and with the pleasantest anticipations ran up the steps of the Beverlys' house, the number of which had fortunately stuck in his memory. There were lights in all the windows of the two lower floors, and as he pressed the electric bell, he saw a shadow flit across the half transparent silk curtains—a shadow which was like a faint silhouette of plump little Madge Beverly.

"It's all right—they're at home, thank goodness!" he said to himself, as he waited for the door to open; and a sense of calm well-being fell upon him, with the assurance that his troubles were over at last. It was like the joy of a bad sailor when the bell of the Channel boat clangs at Calais after a hideous welter of seas in crossing.

A neat servant was soon framed against a yellow background of cheerful light; and at some distance, screened in shadow, the man who had followed Loveland waited once more with a certain anxiety in his eyes.

Val enquired for Mr. and Mrs. Beverly. They were at home, said the servant, in the "living room," with a party of relations who had come to welcome them back after their visit to Europe. If the gentleman would step into the reception room and send up his card, Mr. and Mrs. Beverly would no doubt be down in a minute.

"But when people are at home one doesn't send in one's card," said Loveland, arguing according to English ways.

The servant, trained to American fashions and knowing no others, looked surprised at this statement. He thought the tall gentleman without an overcoat must be a peculiar person, and he had been taught to distrust peculiar persons.

"Tell your master and mistress that Lord Loveland has called, but will not keep them long from their friends," said Val, growing impatient under the man's narrow look.

The servant resented the suggestion that, as a free man, in a free country, he could have a master and mistress. And a Lord Anybody sounded like a practical joke to him; for though he had begun by being a Swede, he had been an American since he was short-coated. However, he was well trained, according to his lights and the family traditions of the Beverlys. He ushered the Practical Joker into a handsome drawing-room, and vanished upstairs to explain the odd young gentleman who never announced himself with cards.

The parlour was a very nice parlour, tastefully furnished. There were portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Beverly, facing each other upon the walls; and the lady's picture, evidently painted many years ago, so poignantly suggested what Madge would be at her age, that Loveland was alarmed.

"I'll do anything else to show my gratitude except marry the daughter," he was making up his mind in advance, when the servant returned, with a grave face. Indeed, it could not have been more solemn if he had come to break the news that all Lord Loveland's surviving relatives had perished together in a holocaust.

"Mr. and Mrs. Beverly are very sorry, sir," said the man, "but they are too much engaged to see anybody tonight."

Val rose, haughtily. His pride and his hopes had both received another severe rap, all the sharper because unexpected, but his face did not show his mortification.

"I'll trouble you to open the door," he said, as the servant stood petrified. And so once more Lord Loveland was thrown upon the hospitality of the streets. The flitting shadows were gone from the windows, which still gleamed cheerily; but they were dark to the outcast's heart.

"I needn't have bothered about how to show my gratitude," he reminded himself. "I don't think they're exactly going to make a point of my marrying their girl, after all."

He was able to smile at this thought, but it was a very faint, chill smile. And his amazement at the treatment he was receiving everywhere, in place of the flattering attention he had been led to expect, was blank and blind as a high stone wall without doors or windows.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

A PROPOSITION

Naturally it occurred to Val that the trail of Cadwallader Hunter must have reached as far as the Beverly household; and almost he found it in his heart to respect a man with executive ability to accomplish so swift, so sweeping, so secret a revenge.

"The old fellow must have had a busy day," Loveland thought, half amused on top of hunger and discouragement. He pictured the Major running lithely about since the snub at lunchtime, up to the last moment before dressing for dinner, prejudicing all the friends made on board the *Mauretania* against the Englishman to whom he had proudly introduced them.

And besides, one must grant a certain cleverness to a brain able to weave grounds of prejudice against a person—nay, a personage—important and unimpeachable, as Loveland considered himself to be. How Cadwallader Hunter had done it, Val could not imagine; but that the mysterious thing which had been done was the Major's work, he did not doubt. As for the bother with the bank, of course that was another matter, a coincidence unconnected with the annoyances which had followed, for Cadwallader Hunter could not have known anything about the letter of credit, or where it was to be presented. And though the spiteful old thing was apparently acquainted with Mr. van Cotter, who had been one of the Coolidge party, he could scarcely have read clairvoyantly all the names on the letters of introduction, even if he knew the people.

As Val asked himself forlornly what was left for him to do next, this last argument brought consolation, and a welcome new idea at the same time. As the Major had "got hold of" the Coolidges, the Miltons and Beverlys, why not go and throw himself on the mercy of some of Jim Harborough's friends?

Loveland had conscientiously distributed all the letters in the afternoon, and had put the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel as a New York address on his visiting cards. Now, owing to unforeseen circumstances (another name for the Major's vindictiveness) that address was his no longer. When people called, as no doubt they would do tomorrow, they were likely to find that he had vanished into space. Yes, without doubt the best thing he could do was to call tonight at one of the houses where he had alighted in the afternoon. He would walk to the nearest one; but—now he came to think of it, which was the nearest, and of which was he certain that he could remember the street and number?

Val had not charged his mind with the addresses on the letters, so sure had he been that the recipients would lose no time in calling. Now, he went over the eight or nine names in his head, and thought that he had kept them all straight; but to save his life he could not say which number, which street, appertained to which person.

This was a dilemma, almost a calamity. But one address seemed to stand out before his eyes—a number in Fifth Avenue; and he thought it was a Mrs. Anson who lived there. The house was a handsome one, at a corner. He had admired it; and as it was not far uptown he would not have more than a mile to travel. He could still make his visit, and tell his pitiful tale, before ten o'clock.

He walked fast, and it was by an effort that the man of the shadows kept him in sight; for Val's legs were long, and his were not. But he did contrive to cling close enough to see a tall figure slowly descend a flight of stone steps climbed with alert hopefulness a few moments earlier.

This time there was a discouraged droop of the head and shoulders and a dragging hesitation in the gait which seemed to show that the wanderer did not know what his next move ought to be.

At last the watcher decided that he had waited long enough. The Englishman had come to the end of his tether. He was tired out and sick at heart; in fact, precisely in the mood which the other had been patiently expecting.

Loveland walked away from the house where Mrs. Anson was "giving a dinner party and regretted that she was unable to receive visitors." Jim Harborough's friend! Could it be that Cadwallader Hunter's tentacles had wormed themselves round this lady's sympathies also, or was the dismissal another coincidence, like that of the bank? Loveland did not know, but he did know that the sole possessions left him were a great hunger which he might not satisfy, and a great longing to have somewhere to lay his head.

"Good evening," said the man who had caught up with him, speaking somewhat breathlessly, but in a friendly voice.

Loveland turned with a slight start, and looked at the other's face, which at that moment could be plainly seen by the light of a street lamp.

There was a vague familiarity in the stranger's appearance, but Val had come into contact with so many new people lately, that he could attach no label to these features.

"I was dining near you at the Waldorf-Astoria," explained the unknown.

"Oh!" exclaimed Loveland, instantly adjusting the label. "You were with the Coolidges, I remember." The tips of his ears began to tingle. This fellow must have seen him walk out of the restaurant where he'd been denied his dinner—probably knew that he had been practically turned away from the hotel, because he hadn't the money to pay his bill.

"My name's Milton," the short, dark man introduced himself. "I've been trying to catch you up for some time."

"Why?" abruptly asked Loveland, suspicious of everybody and everything now.

"Why? Oh, well, I wanted the pleasure of a conversation with you."

"You know who I am?" Loveland enquired.

"Yes, I know who you are." Mr. Milton emphasised each word separately, as if with a tap of a miniature hammer. There was an intentional significance in his way of speaking, but the meaning was obscure to Loveland.

Val could not guess what the other's object was in following him, and in his smarting sensitiveness was on guard against some new indignity.

"I met Mrs. Milton and—your daughter, on the *Mauretania*," he ventured, by way of keeping on neutral ground until he should learn where to take his stand. And truth to tell, he had been so miserable in his homesickness, his sense of desertion and humiliation, that any friendly-seeming companionship was pitifully welcome. A few hours ago he would have quickly decided that he did not like the man's face or manner, and would have made no bones about snubbing him; but there was a high barrier between "then" and "now," and Lord Loveland almost clung to Mr. Milton.

"I know you met my wife and daughter on the *Mauretania*," said the watcher. "That's why I was anxious to make your acquaintance."

Loveland laughed. "You're the first person since I left the ship, who has wanted to make it," he retorted. "And it struck me this evening that neither Mrs. nor Miss Milton was keen on keeping it."

"Miss Milton is a child," answered Miss Milton's father. "She daren't say her soul's her own, if her mother says it isn't; and Mrs. Milton has reasons over and above what anyone else may have, for not wanting to know you, in front of me."

"Over and above what anyone else may have?" Val repeated, lost in surprise at this turning. "Why should she or anyone have reasons for not wanting to know me? That's the thing I should like to find out. Perhaps you'll be good enough to explain the mystery—if you can? What has Major Cadwallader Hunter been doing to put all New York against me?"

"So far as I can see, it wasn't the Major who set the ball rolling, though of course he'd like people to think he was on to it from the first. And it seems he heard you give yourself away a bit to a girl one day, on shipboard—or says he did. But let's not discuss that now. What you are, or what you did before you stepped on board the *Mauretania's* nothing to me. The game you and I are in together (as it's up to me to show you) is this. You're in a pretty bad scrape, and you want to get out of it. Is that true or isn't it?"

"Yes, it's true enough," admitted Val. "But that's not the question. I——"

"Excuse me, it is the question, where I'm concerned. I don't go back on that. I don't want to know anything, or be in anything, else. I can help you out of your fix. That's what I'm here to do."

"Thank you," said Val, drily. "But why?" He half expected that Mr. Milton's *quid pro quo* would be a promise in advance to make Fanny the Marchioness of Loveland.

"Well, I'm coming to that, in one minute and a half. First and foremost let's chat about what I can do for you. Then we'll get to what you can do for me. I guess a thousand dollars would come handy to you, wouldn't it, especially if you could see half in hard cash tonight?"

"If I saw any 'hard cash,' as you call it, lying in the street, and nobody claimed it, I confess I might find a temporary use for the money," said Loveland. "The trouble is, my letter of credit——"

"I know all about that letter of credit, just as well as if you'd told me," broke in Mr. Milton, with a queer mingling of tolerant good-nature and roughness which puzzled Loveland so much that he almost forgot to be annoyed.

"Tomorrow it will be all right," Val went on.

"I wouldn't bet on its being all right tomorrow," said Milton. "But we can wait to talk business till the day after, if you like. That'll suit me just as well; for I stand to make better terms. It's for you to say where. I can give you my card, and you can drop round at my club—I don't ask you to

write, for by that time it might happen you wouldn't have a stamp, or a sheet of paper handy. You can call day after tomorrow, and we'll have our talk then. So long as we've established communication, there isn't much danger of your losing touch with me till we've fixed something up."

"I don't like your manner or your innuendoes," said Loveland, stiffening.

"Oh, I don't mean any innuendoes," protested Mr. Milton, apologetically. "Let's keep friends. I want to help you. You had a little trouble with them at the hotel, didn't you?"

"I was abominably insulted, and I'll make them regret it."

"The best way to do that is to pay the bill right off. There's five hundred dollars in my pocket that's just crying to be in yours. And five hundred more——"

"What do you want me to do?" sharply asked Loveland.

"You'd like to know whether the candle's worth the game, eh? Well, I'm no Shylock. But see here, shall we come to terms over a drink? We're not far off the best bar in New York, and——"

"No, thank you," Val cut in decidedly, though he was cold enough, and hollow enough within to be tempted by the thought of warmth, and refreshment of any sort. "Tell me now what possible motive you, a stranger, can have in offering to lend me two hundred pounds."

"I said nothing about lending," insinuated Mr. Milton. "But if you like to call it a loan, you can. You've got your 'family traditions' to keep up, I suppose?" And he laughed in high good humour.

"I have," said Val, coldly.

"That's all right," returned the other. "Well, to get to business then. You were on pretty friendly terms with Mrs. Milton on board ship?"

"She was very kind to me," replied Val, more sure than ever now that the proposal to come would be matrimonial.

"Good! You've heard, I expect, from Cadwallader Hunter, or some other general purveyor of gossip, that she and I aren't on the best of terms—that we don't get along like a pair of turtle doves?"

"I believe I did hear some hint of that sort, which went in at one ear and out at the other."

"You needn't consider my feelings. My wife and I hate each other like poison. She'd have thrown me over long ago, if she didn't want my money—all my money; not what she might get in alimony if we said 'Goodbye; the parting words are spoken.' Eh? Well, that's just what I *do* want to say to her. We've never had any open break, but the time's come. That's why I sent her to Europe, and sent for her to come back. I played my fish, and now I want to land it. A queer fish, Mrs. Milton is, too, bye the bye. I'm going to bring a case against her, and I want to use you for a trump card in it. You understand?"

A hot wave of rage swept over Loveland. He did understand, and never in his life had he been so angry. He had not known it was in him to be so angry at a thing which did not affect his own selfish interests; but he was not thinking of himself at all. A new or, at least, unknown self stirred faintly in the depths where all his life it had lain asleep, because, perhaps, it had never been called upon to wake. He was not angry because such a proposal had been made to him—Lord Loveland; he had not thought of that part yet. Disgust with the man who could make such a proposition was the one emotion which shook him.

"You beast!" he broke out, in his young, clear voice.

The other man looked up at the flushed, angry face in genuine surprise.

"Oh, I suppose I haven't offered 'your lordship' enough," he sneered, with a sarcastic emphasis on the title. "Well, I'll raise you——"

But something unexpected happened before the offer could be completed. Furious, Loveland slapped him across the mouth, and in dodging the insult, Milton slipped on a morsel of thin ice which glazed the pavement. He staggered, tried to regain his balance, lost it finally, and fell flat upon his back.

Loveland felt suddenly as if he had been drenched with cold water. The man's fall, the stillness of the limp form which lay grotesquely, like a dummy made of rags, was a sight to chill even righteous anger. Loveland hadn't yet begun to think of himself or the danger he might be in. He thought of the man—who seemed to him hardly a man—and wondered if he were dead. Then, after a dazed instant, he bent down over the motionless form, and felt a great throb of relief when he saw no stain of oozing blood on the pavement. The fur lined collar of Milton's coat had been pulled up behind his ears and had broken the force of the fall for the back of his head on which, otherwise, he must have struck with terrible force. Already his thick eyelids were twitching. In another moment or two he would open them. And realising this, Val at last turned to that thought which generally came first: Lord Loveland and Lord Loveland's welfare.

He glanced hastily round, and assured himself that no one was near: no one could have seen the incident, which luckily for him had happened at some distance from a street lamp. He thought

carefully but quickly. If anyone should come—if an alarm were given—if he should find himself in the hands of the police—that would be the worst thing that had happened yet.

This beast who lay there—this beast who had taken advantage of a stranger's misfortunes to try and bribe him to the basest dishonour—wasn't hurt half as badly as he deserved to be. Loveland was glad he had struck the wretch, and would do it again, if it had to be done again, pay for the satisfaction dearly as he might have to pay. But he did not see that there was need to pay at all. If the fellow complained to the police of his assault, Val couldn't defend himself by telling the truth, because Mrs. Milton's name must not be brought in. He did not admire her particularly, and he owed her no gratitude, but she was a woman; and suddenly he knew of himself that he would bear the worst that might befall him, rather than drag Mrs. Milton into a scandal.

For as long as he might have taken to count twelve, perhaps, Lord Loveland stood making up his mind and staring at the man on the ground: then he walked away as quickly as he dared.

How interminable the length of this cross-street seemed! He did not even know what street it was into which he had turned almost mechanically with Milton, as they talked, nor did it matter, if only he could get out, and far enough away before Milton came to himself, to gabble some malicious lie about what had happened.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

INTRODUCING SHAKESPEARE

The end of the street, and no pursuing steps, nor shouts of accusing voices!

Once round the corner, Loveland breathed more freely; but with the white glint of his uncovered evening shirt, he was a marked man among men whose overcoats acknowledged winter, and his one anxiety for the moment was to get on as far as possible in as short a time as possible.

He had two or three small pieces of American money in his pocket, rather more than equal to the value of an English shilling, and he thought of hurling himself into a tearing electric car, or rushing up the steps of an "L" station to board the first train that should come in. But he did not know what destination to name, and feared that, if he professed indifference as to the end of the journey, he might arouse suspicion. It was wiser, he decided, to go on foot, dodging from the brilliantly lighted avenues into the darker cross-streets, and so on, indefinitely, until it seemed safe to call a halt.

Before the unexpected climax of his interview with Mr. Milton Loveland had still hoped for ultimate shelter and dinner, but now he ceased to regard either as a likely goal of his adventure. The great thing was, not to be caught by the New York police, and "run in" for assault, clapped into prison, into print, and forever out of the matrimonial court. The present was very bad, but there was hope for the future, although Milton's hints and strange manner had brought closer the cloud of dark presentiment until it pressed like a thick veil over Loveland's eyes.

When he found himself in the Plaza, and saw the black forest of the park billowing away into distance like the gulf of night, he looked towards it as a refuge. If only it were still open at this hour! If only he could get in!

His doubt died at birth; for a big motor car whizzed by him and into the velvet gloom. Evidently Central Park was not shut to the public at night.

Loveland followed the car; and though moving ghostlike along a tree-walled road, he had not quite the wished-for sense of being blotted out by darkness, it was good to escape from glaring lights and staring people.

When Loveland became accustomed to the gloom, it took on colour to his eyes, and turned from black to a deep, transparent blue which shimmered round him like the shadows of spirit forms; and far away where flared the lights of the "Great White Way" the dusk was beaten into sparks of flame as if a dying torch had been shaken down the sky. The blazing eyes of motor lamps, and yellow-winking carriage-lights moved along the dim drives, and drew the night in after them like a folding curtain.

Val turned out of a broad thoroughfare of the park into a quieter road to avoid the procession of vehicles and the faces that peered from their windows. There were no faces in the world that he wanted to see now, save his mother's—and Lesley Dearmer's, and he was ashamed of the longing which ached in him for those two.

"Buck up, you blighter," he admonished himself. "Don't be an ass or a baby."

It was easy to lash his soul with sage advice. But he felt very small and pitiful in the vast, unfriendly city, where it seemed that there were warm overcoats and good dinners for everybody except the Marquis of Loveland.

He strayed aimlessly along a winding way haunted by a melancholy fragrance of dying leaves, and a silence that rustled with scurrying thoughts which could never embody themselves in

words.

In the great illuminated cañons of the New York streets electricity outshone the stars, and it was hard to tell whether the moon lived or died. But above the Park hung a sky like a bell, purple in its dome, and touched with metallic gleams at the rim where the earth-lights climbed. And bye and bye that purple paled slowly with the moon-dawn that sifted down in silver dust over the black trees, whitening the autumn mists that clung close to the grass like a face-cloth on the dead.

Loveland was bitterly cold now—cold all the way through to his heart—but he flung himself down on a bench under a low-branching tree, and wondered desolately if he had found his quarters for the night.

For a moment he had sat there, trying to marshal the routed army of his thoughts, before he realised that he was not alone on the seat. Something stirred at the far end where the shadow was deepest. There was a faint tinkle as of a fairy bell—a cracked fairy bell, and a tiny shape leaped from the bench. Loveland watched it flitting here and there, darting across the glimmering grey road, and then about to prick daintily back again when a motor swung round the curving corner.

The fragile sound of the bell was drowned, and the little shape would have gone under the fat-tired wheels, to be swept into nothingness like chaff by the wind, had not Val sprung forward, and dashed across the road in front of the car, catching up the morsel in his rush.

He risked his life, but the lights of the car had shown him in one blinding flash that the frisking thing was a miniature black dog, no bigger than his hand; and Val loved dogs big and little with all that was best and warmest in him. Nothing could have tempted him to hurt a dog, or indeed any animal save those it was the legitimate sport of Englishmen to kill; and he could imagine himself murdering a man guilty of cruelty to any helpless creature.

The motor horn gave a shriek, and there was a grinding of brakes, jammed on with savage suddenness, but the car could not have stopped in time. It was only Loveland's quickness which saved him, and scarcely beyond touch of the tyres he stumbled, drawing up his knees to keep from being run over; but he had the tiny, beating body in his hand, held up out of harm's way.

"You fool! You'd have had yourself to thank if you'd been smashed!" growled the chauffeur, who was alone in the car. "And it's God's wonder you didn't make me skid smack into that bench."

Loveland, picking himself up, did not think it worth while to answer, and the chauffeur, who heard the arrival of a policeman unsympathetic to motor men, decided not to stop for further argument. With a parting grumble, he slipped away into the night; and Loveland, by this time on his feet, walked quietly across the road again with the cause of the disturbance quivering in his hand.

"That was a close shave for you, you little beggar," he said half aloud. "Who are you, I wonder, and where did you spring from?"

"Answers to name o' Shakespeare, and dropped out o' my pocket while I snoozed, I guess," said a voice from the shadow. "You bet I'm obliged to you for what you done. 'Twas fine."

Under the big tree that roofed the seat, moon rays dripped between branches like water that trickles slowly through holes in old netting. A man who had been huddled asleep on one corner of the bench was on his feet, holding out eager hands to take the dog from Loveland: a shabby figure even in the dim light, with a hatchet face thin as a new moon, that glimmered pale between the black blot of a frowsy hat and the inky blur of a turned-up coat collar. Val could make out the features but indistinctly, yet he caught the impression of a quaint, patient humourousness, as if a character sketch penned on white paper in three or four sharp black lines had been passed quickly before his eyes.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

SHAKESPEARE'S MASTER

Lord Loveland's habit was to give a wide berth to common people, if Chance, the democrat, threw him near them, with the exception of "Tommies," who for him as a soldier were a class by themselves—a class in which he recognised humanity that touched his own. He did not love ugliness or shabbiness, which as like as not meant microbes; but he had come down so near to the depths of reality tonight, that he had no sense of his own superiority, or inclination to shrink away when the man's hands touched his as they took the rescued animal.

"I came along in the nick of time," said Loveland, "and I like dogs. I thought I could just do it, and I did."

"'Twas fine, all the same," repeated the dog's master. "I ain't much of a public speaker, but I guess you know how I feel, all right. 'Twould 'a pretty near put me out o' business if——" He did not finish his sentence, but the tenderness with which he tucked into his pocket the wretched

little apology for a dog made further words superfluous.

Loveland, always polite to inferiors, unless overmastered by rage, looked at the bench as if it were the first comer's property.

"If you don't mind, I'll sit down," he said.

The shabby one laughed. "I ain't paid for my lodgings," said he, "and if I had, you'd be welcome—after what you done. You can have me for a doormat if you like."

"Thanks," said Loveland, laughing, too. "I don't need a doormat. If it was an overcoat, now——"

"You could have mine, if you weren't twice the size for it, and if Anthony Comstock wouldn't run me in if he saw what I've got on underneath. But I guess you wouldn't have to wish twice for a coat, if 'twas in your part."

"My part?" repeated Val.

"If the piece you're in called for it."

"I don't understand."

They were both sitting down now, filling the far corners of the bench, and talking across it.

"Well, 'tain't my show. I don't want to be fresh. But though I've seen a lot o' night-bloomin' plants growin' in this flower garden, I don't just recall seein' one like you take root."

"You wouldn't now, if I had anywhere else to go," returned Loveland, with his usual frankness.

"Gee! You take me for the fall guy. But say, do you want anything out o' me? 'Cause, if you do, you can have it. If you're a journalist out on a night stunt, and what you're fishin' for is the history o' my life, I'm on, for Shakespeare's sake. Any form you like, sad or gay, moral lesson or otherwise."

"Hang journalists!"

"Think so? Well, millionaire then, seein' how the poor live. You look the swell all right."

"Thank you. Wish I felt as I look, then."

"You'd make the Gould and Vanderbilt crowd look like visitors, if you hadn't forgot your overcoat."

"I left it at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel——"

"Sa—ay, if that ain't like me!" drawled the man, the twinkle of moonlight striking a humourous glint in his eye. "Kind of absent-minded. I left my Sunday suit just that way at the White House last week, where I'd been spending Saturday to Monday with my friend Willy T."

"You think I'm lying?" said Loveland, with curiosity rather than resentment.

"Just kiddin'."

"You're mistaken. They turned me out of the hotel——"

"Gee! But you *was* there?"

"Yes."

"If that ain't the swell thing! I wouldn't mind bein' turned out, if once they'd let me in. I should say to myself, 'Well, sir, you've lived.' That's what I never have done, but what I'm always meanin' to do, when my time comes. Say, would it be offensive if I asked why they—er——"

"Turned me out? I couldn't pay for my dinner."

"Had you *eat* it?"

"No. I wish now I had."

"I believe you. Whe—ew! Just to eat once at the Waldorf!"

"I had lunch there," said Val, beginning to be a little warmer, because he was amused.

"Bet it was bully."

"I wasn't hungry—then."

"Pity! Still," the man at the other end of the bench murmured reflectively, "you've got it to remember, and I guess a lot of other nice things."

"If that were any comfort!"

"'Twould be to me. Say, I don't throw myself out much to strangers, but you saved my dog for me, while I was snoozin' like a sick dormouse, and there's somethin' about you kind o' gets me. Suppose we swop stories,—if you really ain't on in this act. If you're not kiddin'—playin' some game—if you're here because you're stumped, why maybe I might put you up to somethin'—see? Wasn't there a verse in the Bible about a lion and a mouse?"

"I think the lion and the mouse were Æsop," said Val.

"Never heard of the gent. But anyhow, I caught on to it in Sunday School—when I was a kid, I'm dead sure of that, and I always was a quoter. You ain't a New Yorker, are you?"

"No. I'm an Englishman," Loveland answered quickly.

"Gee, but you're a swell-lookin' emigrant! I ain't a New Yorker myself—not by birth. I was a hayseed till I turned nineteen; workin' on my stepfather's farm—mean old skinflint, but I couldn't see my way to cuttin' till my mother was gone. Then I footed it to New York—sixty mile—chuck full of hope, and nothin' else, unless beans."

"A regular Mark Tapley," said Val.

"Never played the part. In private life my name's Bill Willing; some switches it round to Willing Bill, because I generally do my day's work without howlin'; I blew into New York without attractin' much notice, and that's nineteen years ago, and I haven't attracted much since, that's a fact. But you may do better. Don't be discouraged by a setback, if your game's square, and I bet it is, or you wouldn't be in the dog savin' business. What *is* your lay, anyhow?—excuse the liberty."

"Retrieving my fortune," said Val, after a moment's reflection.

"You can see me one better. Mine's to make yet, and I'm no kid—like you. I won't see thirty-eight again. I'm an artist. But New York ain't woke up to my talent. Maybe I've been too versatile. That never did pay. The line I'd mapped out was paintin' pictures, but my chance was slow comin'. Had to take what I could get on the way along: supin', sandwichin', barkin'—"

"Eh, what?" broke in Loveland.

"You don't savvy? Oh, supin' in theatres. There's several, specially one in the Bowery, wouldn't 'a been complete without me for years, till I got the chuck like you did at the Waldorf. Sandwichin'—why, you know what that is, sure? You wouldn't think how you get the cramps shut up between the boards? The sandwichin' was generally in the theatrical line, too, so I've always kind of hovered around the profession, though I don't say I'm proud of my career as a barker in the dimes—museums, you know. There was money in the business, though, if the freaks hadn't caught on that I had the heart of a soft boiled egg—always ready to part if they worked the aged mother dodge, or the baby brother who threw fits. I ain't no penny-in-the-slot savings bank. Wish I was. I should be better off now. Besides, my voice ain't an automobile horn, and barkin' for a couple of seasons stove a hole in my top note. After that, no manager would take me with a pound of tea and a chromo, but one of my old govs switched me onto a job paintin' freak showboards, and I'd 'a been at it yet if freaks didn't last too long. Once you've put them on the boards, there they *are*. At present my speciality's meenoos."

Val looked blank, thinking of emus.

"French for grub cards. A swell like you ought to be on to that. But I'm just thinkin' what there is for you. This stunt of mine I dropped into by luck. 'Twas Shakespeare introduced me—like he did to you tonight."

"Why Shakespeare?" Loveland cut in.

"Oh, there's a—a girl in that story: actress in the theatre where I suped—a real actress, mind you, a Fascinator from Fascinatorville. Why Lil so much as looked at me, I don't know—but she did. I was near twice her age, and 'twould have been playin' the game too low down to try and hook onto her, though I was tempted—she was so pretty, so good to me. I don't know what would 'a been the upshot, if the property man, who had his eye on the gal, hadn't got me the sack, and Lil an engagement on the road. She and I drifted apart. I never wrote, though she asked me to; I knew 'twas better not, for her. But you see why I'm nuts on the dog. He was hers, and Shakespeare was her name for him. She loved Shakespeare's plays, and her ambition was to act in 'em. But all that's somethin' I wouldn't 'a mentioned—if you hadn't kind of earned the right to Shake's history. I was tellin' you about my speciality, and how Shake introduced me to it. We was on our beam ends, Shake and me, our ribs showin' through the silk. One mornin' after a night out—like this, only in a square downtown, I was circulatin' around till I blew into Twelfth Street, and dropped my eyes onto a new restaurant, with a good fried smell, and an idea hit my brain like a hammer. In I walks and offers to swop it with the boss for a dinner. He wasn't takin' any just then, but I talked till I waked him up, showed him what I could do in the art line, and began to work on the spot with a grand new thing in meenoos. I've been at it ever since, and though the pay don't go up by leaps and bounds, the house has, and lots o' the eaters say it's my work's made it what it is—brought in the public like a flock of sheep. I get two meals and three dimes a day out of the job, and I wouldn't be sleepin' in my country house tonight, if I hadn't run acrost a guy who needed my money more than I did. Well, it's all in the day's work; and I guess there ain't many swells have got a finer palace than this, though it's kind of draughty. Your castle across the pond ain't got a finer park, I bet?"

"My castle's full of draughts, too," Loveland humoured him.

"So you came over here to get out of 'em?"

"Exactly."

"And that fortune you want to retrace, or *re*trieve. Wisht I could help."

"I'm expecting a cablegram in the morning, that will put me all right, thank you," said Loveland. "You're a good chap, and I'm glad to have met you, for you've—er—broadened my outlook, as well as passed the time. I've only to worry through till tomorrow."

"That's some hours off," said Bill Willing. "Wisht I could invite you to my hotel where I hang out when I'm not at my country place, but the trouble is to see the colour of your money, or you don't see the colour of their beds."

"How much is it for a room?" asked Loveland.

"Oh, a room! I don't run to a room. A bed in a vast wilderness is good enough for me. But a quarter'll get you one. Three nickels for a bed."

Loveland searched his pockets, and dubiously exhibited two silver coins mixed democratically with a few nickels and impotent looking little coppers. The prospect appeared hopeless to him, but Willing exclaimed with delight.

"Gee! Forty-five cents! You're a bloated millionaire. You might be asleep in two beds at the Bat Hotel, instead of cooling in this ice-cream freezer."

"If there's the price of two beds, you must have one," said Loveland.

"Thank you. You're the real stuff," returned Bill, gratitude in his voice. "But I'm O. K. where I am. You stick to your stamps. I know just how you feel. I'm always chuckin' my last cent away on some poor dickybird, thinkin' 'twill be all right tomorrow and what's the odds."

"There are no odds against me this time," Val assured him. "You've cheered me up no end, and you must share what I have. But about the hotel?"

"It's clean all right. Mayn't be the Plaza or the Waldorf, but no dive. It's warm, and the rooms are real natty."

"What about food?" asked Loveland. "Can we run to it?" and he glanced at the coins in his hand.

"Keep the change. We'll eat for nothing. Now's our time to join the Bread Line."

Again Val looked blank, and again it was necessary for Bill Willing—guide, philosopher and friend—to explain. There were, said he, two very important lines drawn every night in New York for the benefit of the poor: the Bread Line and the Bed Line. Each was drawn in a public square; the former in Herald, the latter in Madison; and both were traced by the finger of Charity.

The Bed Line, Bill did not often patronize, because he could generally pay for his own sleeping accommodation, and if he couldn't, there were always the Parks. Besides, the parson chap who spoke in Madison Square every night for the benefit of the poor, could collect only money enough to supply a limited number of men with beds. There was such a long line waiting, always, and the unlucky ones went away into the night looking so disappointed. Bill couldn't bear that, or the thought that one more must go bedless because he had got in ahead. As for the Bread Line, that was different. There was usually enough to feed the whole line, with coffee thrown in. It was a good show, too, and sometimes when Bill had separated himself from his last coin, and wanted a little cheerful company, he linked onto the Bread Line. Tonight they would both go. "Unless," added Mr. Willing, "you're afraid some o' your swell friends may spot you?"

Even if Loveland had been afraid, he would have denied the imputation. "You're the only friend, swell or otherwise, that I have in New York," said he.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE LIGHTS OF NEW YORK

It seemed to Lord Loveland that he had never known how dazzling light could be, till the night-lights of New York flung their diamonds into his eyes.

Though it was nearly midnight when he emerged from behind the purple bed-curtains of the sleeping Park, there was no sign that less secluded quarters of the city thought of sleep.

The amazing jewels of the city still scintillated against the sky, flashing coloured fire. The Great White Way still blazed with brightness brighter than day: the huge plate-glass windows of shops closed to customers, advertised attractions for tomorrow. Electric cars were still crowded, going up and down. Overhead was a ceaseless rush and roar of elevated trains: and Herald Square, which the comrades reached by short cuts and devious ways known to the initiated, seemed the beating heart of the big, vital body whose diamond-crowned head was in the sky.

In the glass-sided palace of the "Herald," tomorrow morning's paper was visibly going to press. There was a chewing rumble of huge printing machines, and from somewhere out of sight of the bronze owls' staring, electric eyes sprang covered wagons loaded with "up-state" editions, which must catch early trains. Newsboys were yelling extras, trying to howl each other down above the confused storm of sound; and as "Willing Bill" towed his convoy into the Square, Minerva lifted her noble bronze arm to give the midnight signal. Her pair of obedient blacksmiths swung their

hammers lustily, and struck the bell twelve times.

Val and his companion were nearly the last in a long procession of applicants for newspaper hospitality, and for the first time in his life Lord Loveland found himself among the dregs of humanity, learning what it might be to suffer as they suffered, they who seethed in the cauldron of the world's misery.

He had known that this sort of thing existed; that there were men and women who went hungry and thirsty, who slept out of doors, and who had no place on earth's surface which even for a night they might call their own; but he had been wont to skip paragraphs about them in the papers, and had always avoided brushing against a shabby person in a crowded street. He had never felt any tie of blood between himself and common men, except the Tommy Atkins who fought and died round him in South Africa. Yet these weary ones on whom the light of Herald Square blazed down, these men of hopeless, concave faces, beaten in by sin or sorrow, pressed near to Loveland's soul and waked some feeling in it which he had never known. It was as if his friend of the Park had initiated him into some strange, secret society, in joining which the bare fact of membership gave at once a mysterious sense of brotherhood. Val was surprised that he felt no repulsion against the ragged wretches who crowded round him. He did not draw himself away from them, or resent their lack of respect for him as a superior being. He was sorry for them all, with a consciousness of kinship, which, he thought, he would probably remember with amusement tomorrow.

"They think you're some fly reporter, takin' notes; or a swell doin' the night sights," said Bill. "They don't like you much. But they won't bother you neither, only some chap may say 'What queer things you see, when you haven't got your gun.' If he does, don't you take notice, that's all."

Loveland promised forbearance, but his patience was not tried. In his turn (which came when his nose had turned a pale lilac with cold, and the silk-clad insteps above his pumps were slowly congealing) he received a tin of hot coffee, and a roll. Food and drink were so good, and, as Bill said, "filled such a long-felt want," that Val bolted them greedily, only to yearn for more when both were gone. But etiquette was strictly preserved in Herald Square. No one asked for a second helping, and each applicant, when he had drained his coffee to the last drop, walked away without a word unless it were a "thank you."

"Now, ho for the Bat Hotel," exclaimed Bill cheerfully. "It's a goodish step; but as for me, after that grub, I feel like I could do a sprint round the world."

Loveland was refreshed, too, and more than ever inclined to look on the experience as an adventure over which he would laugh tomorrow night. But he did not intend to forget Bill Willing when he forgot the troubles through which Bill was his pilot. He must do something for the poor chap, he said to himself, and glowed with hot coffee and a sense of warm generosity.

Bill's hotel, it appeared, was situated in the Bowery. There were others more or less of the same sort, dotted about in various streets of far eastern and far western New York, but Bill would not guarantee these. "I ain't a top wave swell myself—yet," he said, "but dirt and I ain't friends, and I won't risk no menagerie for neither of us, nor Shakespeare either. I've raised him to be particular. He's that *sad* when he's made a public thoroughfare of by one or two o' them critters as boarded the ark in disguise, that he won't look me in the face."

Shakespeare, who had shared his master's roll, and lapped the last spoonful of coffee, was an incredibly small, black animal of somewhat moth-eaten texture, who in form rather resembled a grasshopper. He had a little sharp nose, which might have been whittled into shape with a penknife; his legs were too long for his tiny body, and not much thicker than a pencil; but his gentle eyes, curiously like his master's, beamed with affection, and he was turning grey in the flower of his youth, owing to the lava heat of his boiling emotions.

Loveland had visions of buying Shakespeare a red collar when he had cashed his letter of credit tomorrow; but with a sudden pang, he remembered a difficulty concerning that letter of credit which had not occurred to him before. He had wired to the bank in London in the afternoon, and given as his address the Waldorf-Astoria. After the way in which he had been treated, and the manner of his exit, it would be beneath his dignity to go back, on any errand whatever. He must send to the hotel for the cablegram which, it seemed certain, would arrive during the morning; also for the visiting cards which some of Jim and Betty Harborough's friends were sure to leave after calling and finding him gone. Perhaps some of these cards would make the hotel people regret the error of their ways. But apologies would be in vain. He would go to the Plaza, or the Belmont—

"We approach the castle doors, me lord," grandiloquently announced Bill, little guessing that his jesting way of address was that to which Loveland was accustomed from his inferiors.

Val started from the reverie in which he had been walking at his companion's side like a mechanical figure. He waked to find himself in a brilliantly illuminated street, like a tenth-rate imitation of Broadway, lined with lighted shops, gaudy restaurants and strange houses of entertainment.

"This is the Bowery," Bill mentioned with pride.

The Bowery? English Loveland had vaguely expected a gentle suburb of trees and flowers, such as American Bill might have pictured Bloomsbury. And as Willing knew naught of the pleasant

"Bouweries" of old Dutch days, he had no explanation to mitigate his companion's disillusionment.

They passed a tall building whose red front was pictorial with advertisements of Wonders such as the world could not have survived had it seen them in the flesh.

"My old pitch," said Bill. "I painted the Fat Twins with their heads under their arms, and the Half-Zebra-Half-Camel. The Fair One with Golden Locks, too, and the Human Bone are my Shay Doovers. What do you think of 'em, chum?"

"Chum" was filled with respectful admiration of the artist's imagination, if not of his *technique*, and he replied fervently that the Shay Doovers in question were marvellous.

"Here's where I used to bark," went on Bill with a sigh for past glories. "They'd ought to give us free passes for a look round, if you'd like, but the Boss ain't built that way, and there's nothing to see anyhow. The Freaks *ain't* what they're painted. *Couldn't* be, for a dime."

Loveland answered that no doubt the pictures were the best part of the show, which pleased the artist, and they walked on, Bill blasé, Val interested to the point of self-forgetfulness. A few doors to the left, after passing a shooting gallery and a drinking saloon which called itself a café, Mr. Willing paused in front of a tall building which loomed up dingy and ill-lighted in comparison with its gaudy neighbors. A lamp over a low-browed door drew sufficient attention to the announcement, printed in faded lettering, that this was "The Bat Hotel. For Gentlemen Only."

Bill Willing opened the door as if he were at home, as indeed he was, for "The Bat" had been his headquarters, more or less, for years. He sometimes paid in advance for a week, or weeks, at a time, and then the same bed and locker were scrupulously reserved for him; but he had been a little irregular lately, owing to his many promiscuous charities.

"Come in, do," he said hospitably, and Loveland obeyed, to find himself standing directly at the foot of a long, dimly lit stairway, the steps of which were protected from the wear and tear of time and boots by strips of iron.

At the top was a closed door; and this open, Loveland was plunged into the life and movement of the Bat Hotel, appropriately named for its night activities. Behind a grating, which formed a small room, stood the proprietor or manager of the establishment, ready to accept payment, allot beds, inscribe the names of new clients in a book, and deal out keys of lockers or cubicles. This tiny office was cut out of a long narrow room, in which fifty or sixty men were sitting glancing over the newspapers, or writing a last letter before they went to bed. They were grouped at one of several long tables that ran down the length of the room, or assembled round a huge iron stove whose fat body was almost red hot. The crude white light of unshaded electric lamps exaggerated the hollows in tired faces, and brought out a kind of tragic family likeness among them, different as were the types, and features: the likeness born of the same kind of hardships endured without hope of anything better in the world.

There were two windows at front and back of the long room, but they were closed, save perhaps for a furtive crack at the top, and the heated atmosphere was charged with the smell of cheap tobacco (for the men were allowed to smoke, though not to drink, in the Bat Hotel), badly aired clothing and hot humanity. As Bill easily leaned his elbows on a narrow shelf in front of the office grating, explaining his errand to the manager, Loveland wished himself back in the Park again, half drowned in perfumed, moony vapour; but it was too late. He was "in for it" now, he said to himself, as Bill, with a certain pride, announced that "his friend" wanted a room. "A bed for mine," he went on pleasantly. "I'd be glad of 81, if it's free. I always sleep mighty well in 81."

Eighty-one was engaged, but Bill got another number to which he was accustomed, and then his friend's name was asked.

"Anything you like, up to Edward Seventh, or down to J. Smith," whispered Mr. Willing, as he moved away that Loveland might take his place at the grating.

Loveland hesitated for an instant, and then gave the name of P. Gordon, one to which he had a right, among many others.

As Bill was competent to play host, they were given their keys, and allowed to find their own way to their quarters. Loveland's number was on the next floor, but Bill's cheaper lodging was higher up.

At the top of another flight of iron-bound stairs was a row of cubicles, boarded in half-way up to the ceiling, and protected above by thick wire netting, lest some nimble night-prowler, moved by curiosity or a less fanciful motive, should be minded to enter his neighbour's dwelling in spite of lock and key.

The cubicles were not numerous, for such accommodation *de luxe* was beyond the means, beyond even the ambition of a hundred out of the hundred and sixty men whom the Bat Hotel sheltered each night. The row (called "Fifth Avenue" by those who could not afford to sleep there) was partitioned off from a long room the size of the reading-room below; but here, instead of tables and benches running along the walls, were beds, many beds, placed at small, irregular distances from each other. A faint light revealed them, and the straight dark shapes of the lockers shared, half and half, by the sleepers whom Loveland could dimly see hunched up under their grey blankets.

Some men slept in their clothes for warmth, though the room was not cold. Here and there a hat or cap made a black blot on a thin, flattened pillow, and the turned-up collar of an overcoat appeared above a tightly-wrapped blanket. At the back, dark door-ways led to the washroom; and a few wearily drooping figures flitted to and fro, silently as the bat which lent its name to their lodging. Save for their dragging footsteps, which scarcely sounded on the cement floor, damp with disinfectant, there was no sound in the big dormitory, unless an occasional snore or a word blurted out in sleep.

Bill unlocked the door of Loveland's cubicle for him. "This is pretty complete, ain't it?" he asked in a whisper which respected the slumber of others. "The beds are good enough for mine; but these rooms are fit for a lord."

It was a much humbled lord who shut himself up in the boasted magnificence of No. 15, there finding himself possessed of a narrow hospital bed spread with a grey blanket strongly scented with carbolic, and just space enough in the case to undress if he chose. But for reasons which seemed good to him he did not choose.

Having bidden Bill "good-night" without saying a word in disparagement of the Bat Hotel (moved by a new unselfishness which would not for the world have hurt his friend's feelings) Loveland took off collar, necktie and shoes, to roll himself up in the disinfected blanket. The bed was not more than three or four inches too short for his tall body, and though the mattress and pillow were as flat as stale jokes, and hard as poverty, Val fell asleep.

Sleeping, dreams came to him, more real in seeming than any happenings of the strange, nightmare day just passed.

They were of storms at sea, of fighting in South Africa; and when a light persistent tapping at the thin door wrenched him awake he thought he was being called for a night *sortie*.

"Yes! All right!" he muttered, sitting up dazedly. "I—what—"

"Sh! You'll rouse everybody," whispered Bill Willing's warning voice. "Unlock the door, will you?"

Still half asleep, Loveland blinked in the dim light, found the key in the lock and turned it. Like a shabby ghost, Bill stole into the cubicle. "Mighty sorry to rout you out so early," he said, in cautiously lowered tones, "but it's six o'clock, and in half an hour I've got to be at the restaurant to begin work. If you'll get ready and come along, the Boss's daughter, Miss Izzie, may take a shine to you, and smuggle you a breakfast when Alexander the Great, her pa, ain't there to say no."

By the time that Bill had made his plans clear, Loveland's drugged memory had begun to work. He recalled everything, with the sensation of having opened a gate to set free a troop of grunting wild pigs. He was cold: the carbolic smell, which he hated, made him feel sick. His head throbbed as if tacks were being stuck into his temples and torn out again. His muscles were stiff, and he felt more tired than when he had lain down. It was disgusting to think that he had slept in his clothes, in such a place as this, and had nothing fresh to put on, and he loathed his own body because of the squalor in which it had consented to wallow.

How he longed for a cold bath in a great white porcelain tub, clean linen, neat tweeds, and the luxurious silver toilet things, all of which would have been his morning portion at home, or at the Waldorf-Astoria! But repinings only added to the hatefulness of his situation. He saw that, and shook them off, yet it was on the tip of his tongue to vent his irritation on Bill, and yesterday he would have yielded as soon as tempted. But something had changed in him since yesterday. Something stirred, that through all his life had been asleep.

He made himself as neat as he could, did not grumble at the washing accommodation, and moved with caution for fear of disturbing men whom twenty-four hours ago he would have considered no more than sheep. That was because he had been of the brotherhood, and though he expected soon to give up his membership, he would never be able to forget. Men such as these with whom he had touched shoulders would never be Things for him again.

It was still night in the Bat Hotel as Loveland and Bill slipped their keys into the key-box, and tip-toed downstairs; but outside, though the lights of New York had been put out, the light of the world, climbing up the far horizon, had begun to gild the city's domes.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

IZZIE OF THE ALMOND EYES

It was not often that Loveland came into personal relations with sunrise, and to see the rose and golden banners float high and higher above the roofs and sleeping windows of New York, was like being first gazer at some great painting in a Private View. There was hope and promise of joy in such beauty, but he felt wretchedly out of the picture in his rumpled evening clothes.

The virginal purity of dawn, translucent above the turgid darkness of the town, made Lesley Dearmer seem suddenly to be very near him, so that the air shone with her invisible presence.

How sweet she was, how delicately quaint in all her thoughts, how kind to others despite her clear wit, and how sure of ultimate goodness, as she was of life!

Lesley had said that she had "faith in his other side," as she had faith in the other side of the moon, though she did not expect ever to see either. "You will always go on getting what you want," she had prophesied just before they parted. What would she think of that prophecy if she were even to dream of this humiliated figure, creeping out of night to a new day?

Bill's hatchet face glimmered sallow and shabby through the pearly twilight, and there was a frayed look under the patient, humourous eyes. "Are you cold?" he asked.

"A little," replied Val. "But I don't mind."

"You ain't used to the climate yet," said Bill, "and I'd make you squeeze into my overcoat, only I'm a bit too sketchy underneath. Can't afford to get me winter wardrobe back from my uncle's yet."

They passed out of the Bowery, and turned into Twelfth Street. Most of the houses still had their eyelids shut in sleep, and their brick faces looked dull, lacking all interest in life, as if it were hardly worth while to wake up for another day patterned upon a dreary yesterday. But in the middle of the first block there was one house which showed some faint signs of life.

Originally it had resembled its neighbours in all essential features, but the front on the ground floor had been altered, a large window of plate glass having been put in; and from this window a sleepy, sulky, bullet-headed youth was in the act of removing a few gouts of mud splashed up by some passing cart. Above the wide window, in all the glory of red and gold paint not yet faded, was the legend: "This is Alexander the Great's." Inside, its face turned towards the glass, was a big, framed blackboard covered with pictorial advertisements of various dishes, done in chalks of violent hues, while from a gilded strip of cornice depended large squares of cardboard glorifying Alexander the Great and his system, in lettering of black and scarlet.

"Yesterday's show," explained Bill. "My work, the whole lot. The cards last out the week; but the meenoo on the blackboard's new every day. I tell you, it takes brain work! Hurry up, chum. I'm late."

The sleepy youth left the door open, and they went in, passing directly into a room fitted up as a restaurant. The walls were painted with lurid representations of Alexander the Great's battles, the costumes and scenery having been studied more with a view to sensational effect than accuracy of historical detail. There was a wild *melée* of warriors mixed with palm trees, against backgrounds of rose-red sky, and cobalt sea; and the face of Alexander—always a prominent figure in each scene—was evidently a portrait done from a Hebraic model.

"What do you think of it?" asked Bill, who was hastily unbuttoning his overcoat, to reveal a collar of immaculate celluloid and a jacket or "blazer" of blue and yellow stripes.

"It's very striking," replied Val.

"My idea," said Bill, proudly. "Got it from the name over the door, as I passed by that first day. Came to me like a shot. And then I thought of the picture meenoos. When they're goin' to have rabbit, give 'em a rabbit nibblin' a bit of lettuce—make it realistic. When they're goin' to hev punkin pie, just make their mouths water only to see its portrait in the window, so they've *got* to walk in and eat a chunk of the old original, if it takes their bottom nickel. Now, while I work like heat lightnin', you amuse yerself examin'in' my Shay Doovers."

As he spoke, he darted to a door at the back of the room, in front of which hung a red curtain. Behind this curtain he disappeared with his cherished overcoat, returning in a moment without the coat and with the materials for his work, in a wooden box originally intended for starch. Whistling melodiously "I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls," he mounted the low platform in the window, which supported the blackboard, and began to mop out yesterday's brilliant triumphs with a wet sponge.

A list of the principal dishes for the day had been jotted down for him in pencil on a bit of paper which he pinned to the frame of the blackboard lest memory prove treacherous in some succulent detail; and then, with true artistic abandonment, he forgot everything except his work.

Meanwhile, Loveland sought the neighbourhood of a huge stove which, its flaming mouth muzzled with talc, looked like a black, round-bodied goblin squatting, short-legged, on an island of zinc. The sulky boy had made up the fire; and carrying off a coal-scuttle full of grey ashes which he had raked out, he too vanished behind the red curtain.

Evidently ventilation was not one of the many popular specialities of Alexander the Great's establishment, for the atmosphere of the restaurant was heavy with the fumes of yesterday's food, the pictorial advertisements of which were being now expunged from the blackboard. There were gay duplicate patches on the two sides of this board; and Loveland thought, in faint disgust, that he could detect a separate smell for each dish represented. There was the ferocious-looking, horned animal which might be anything from a mere mad bull to a Minotaur, rising head and shoulders out of a blue cup. Yes, certainly the beast had left a rich, soupy perfume, which mingled curiously with that of the defiant fighting cock who spurred his way out of, or into, a pie-dish, and with the fruity fragrance of a roly-poly pudding which belched forth azure steam.

"Alexander the Great Fights Fair," announced one dangling card in the window. "Alexander the

Great Wins Every Time," alleged another. "Alexander the Great Gives Great Grub." "Dine at Alexander the Great's, and you Dine like a Prince." "You Get From Alexander the Great for 25 c. More than You Get Anywhere Else for a Dollar." And so on, one glowing eulogy after another, all round the window and hanging like a fringe from the front of a large red desk at the back of the room near the window of a kind of butler's pantry.

The room itself, with its bare but tolerably clean floor, was crowded with small marble tables whose iron supports were painted light vermilion to match the desk, the chairs and benches; in fact, everything that could be red in the room was red, including doors, window-frames, and even the clock on a rough mantel-piece which cut one of Alexander's horses and a palm tree in halves.

Loveland had warmed himself thoroughly for the first time since leaving the Waldorf, and had lost his disgusted sense of the close atmosphere, when the red clock struck seven. At the same moment someone pushed aside the door curtain, and came into the restaurant from a passageway at the back. Val turned his head, and saw a very handsome, very untidy young Jewess.

Her heavy black hair was twisted up anyhow on the top of her head, and half a dozen patent arrangements for waving the front locks dangled low over the double arch of beautiful brows. A full white throat which would seem not quite long enough at forty, was gracious in its ivory curves at nineteen, even though it rose out of a purple flannel dressing-gown that left the wearer's figure to the beholder's imagination.

The girl came in yawning, but at sight of Loveland her languishing, almond-shaped eyes opened wide, and a lovely carnation stained the peachy sallowness of her rounded cheeks. She bit her full underlip, with little even teeth that were white as kernels of corn in contrast with the coral of her mouth.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, catching together her unbuttoned wrapper at the throat, and taking a step backward, towards the door. Suddenly she looked haughty, and a little defiant. "I didn't know anybody was here, except Bill. We don't open till seven thirty. People don't come in this early. But if you——"

"Thank you, I'm afraid I'm not a customer," said Loveland, pulling off his cap, and flushing a little with embarrassment for himself and for the girl.

"This gent's me friend. His name's Gordon—P. Gordon," explained Bill.

The girl laughed, self-consciously, pleased, yet half suspicious of the handsome young man who had paid her the compliment of taking off his hat. She was not used to men who did that, even for pretty girls like her; but then she was not used to such men as Loveland. She recognised the difference between him and the others, in an instant, and decided that he was not "guying"; therefore that she need not hold herself stiffly on guard. Not only was he the handsomest young man she had ever seen, but he was a "swell," and swells did not patronise Alexander the Great's. She wondered what he wanted, and why he should pose as a friend of Bill's. Evidently he had been up all night, or he would not be in evening dress at seven o'clock in the morning, but he had not the air of having enjoyed himself. Perhaps Bill had helped him out of some scrape. He looked gloomy and savage, like some gallant and beautiful animal driven to bay, an effect which interested the girl very much and made her like him better.

"I must trespass on your hospitality for a few minutes," Val said hastily, "until Mr. Willing has time to help me carry out my plans for the day. When he's finished his work——"

"You ain't in anyone's way here, I'm sure," returned the young woman, still eyeing the mysterious stranger aloofly, but with admiration. She put up one plump hand and uneasily touched the dangling hair-wavers, as if she wished to tuck them out of sight.

"This is Miss Izzie, that I told you about," announced Bill, in his best society manner, "the Boss's daughter."

The girl bowed, as she had seen heroines do on being introduced to heroes, in plays at an adjacent melodramatic theatre. "How often must I tell you, Bill, not to call me 'Miss Izzie'? Miss Isidora—if you please. I hate Izzie." And she glanced out of the corners of her long almond-shaped eyes at Loveland. "You're an actor, ain't you, Mr. Gordon?" she asked.

"No, I'm not," replied Val, stiffening slightly.

"Excuse me, if I've said the wrong thing," cooed the girl, in her soft, rather guttural tones, sweet as if she spoke with honey in her mouth. "I didn't see how Bill come to have a swell friend, unless 'twas an actor. Bill used to be always around the theatres before he worked for us, so I thought ——" She paused, still gazing through drooped lashes; then turned away with a little shrug. "But I must go. I only came down like this, Bill, to have a look round for Pa, because he's sick with a cold. I told him I'd see after things till he's better. He don't like me foolin' round in business hours, with a lot of men staring and passing remarks" (she threw another glance at Val, to see if he were impressed by this exclusiveness) "but he feels too bad to care today. I'll go pour myself into my glad rags now and be down again as soon as I can."

"Boss sick, is he?" said Bill, who was finishing his work on the room side of the blackboard, by indicating a lobster with thick, scarlet strokes of fast flying chalk. "Won't be down till bye-and-bye!"

The daughter of Alexander the Great showed her dimples. "You think that means you'll get a free meal, I guess. When the cat's away——"

"And has got a pretty, kind kitten for his understudy," Bill finished.

"We—ell, you know I'm soft, don't you? If you want anything, look sharp and get it, or Pa might change his mind and pop in. Won't you have something, Mr. Gordon?" she went on, hospitably, dropping the rough and ready manner she used with Bill, for another attempt at imitating the stage heroine who was her ideal of high-born feminine graciousness.

"If you'll trust me till afternoon for the price of a breakfast," Val answered, trying to speak lightly.

"O!" she exclaimed, "I didn't ask you to *pay*. Pity if I can't invite a friend to have a meal, without anyone making a fuss. I was just guying about Bill. Besides, he's different. Pa throws in his dinner and supper as part of his pay, and he's supposed to look out for his own breakfast. He gets good money here, I'm sure, and if he's so soft that every old applewoman or lame bootblack can wheedle his money off him, why that's his business, and Pa says we ought to learn him better instead of encouraging him to go on the way he does. That's why I have to sneak him a doughnut and a cup of coffee on the sly sometimes. But I want you to understand I've *invited* you to breakfast, as a gentleman friend of mine, and I shall be real hurt if you talk about paying."

"Very well, I'll accept your invitation with thanks, provided you'll breakfast with me," said Val, as gallantly as if he were addressing a Duchess—or a popular chorus girl.

"My! I couldn't do that," answered Isidora. "Pa'd be wild if he got to know I eat a meal in the restaurant. We've a parlour upstairs," she went on, with a pretty air of importance, "and the hired girl brings our meals, Pa's and mine, for he doesn't have his down, either, except when he's in a hurry, and just picks up a bite as he goes. But you'll be seeing me soon again," she reassured Loveland. "I shall be at the desk in Pa's place."

This was her exit speech, and she made it close to the red curtain, which in another moment had blotted her out of sight. From some region beyond the drapery, now came an appetizing smell of breakfast: coffee, frizzling ham and frying sausages. The sulky boy, his face shining with kitchen soap, came in with a tray full of dishes, and a red-faced, middle-aged German followed, who stared with goggling, gooseberry eyes at Loveland, the while he clawed clean cups and saucers from a hidden cupboard.

Not fifteen minutes had passed when Miss Alexander alias Solomon reappeared, this time in all her glory, panting with haste and the snugness of her stays (perhaps she had drawn them in extra tight), yet smiling in conscious beauty.

"My, but you *are* got up to kill, this morning!" exclaimed Bill Willing; and the fair Isidora darted a vexed glance at him, for she had wanted the "swell" to believe that this gorgeousness was her daily toilet.

She had put on a red cloth dress, which might have been made to suit the restaurant, as well as the wearer; her bust was magnificently full, and her waist impossibly small. She had powdered her olive face to a pearly whiteness, and her black pompadour, with its bright undulations, looked as if it would have scorned the plebian aid of metal hair-wavers.

"Now, the show's ready to begin," she announced, with a smile and a glance, all, all for Loveland. And she was so lusciously handsome in her richly developed young beauty that Val, despite the revolt of his fastidiousness, admired her reluctantly.

No customers had come in yet, and Isidora insisted that Mr. Gordon should have his breakfast. Bill, she said, could go into the kitchen and "sneak something" from the cook; but it was Loveland's whim not to eat unless his chum ate with him, and Isidora secretly liked him the better for his loyalty to one so humble, not knowing that it was a new development.

She had little of Bill's delicacy in the matter of asking questions, and found it so impossible to restrain her curiosity that while Loveland disposed of ham and egg, coffee and a doughnut, she hovered near the table, trying with all her skill to probe the handsome stranger's mystery.

Inclined to be reserved at first, it soon occurred to Loveland that, since any port in a storm was better than no port, he had better enlist Miss Alexander's aid. In response to her bids for confidences, he said that he had landed in America yesterday, and had gone to the Waldorf-Astoria, to find on his arrival that his clothes had been stolen out of his luggage by an English servant. He added that his London bankers had been dilatory about instructing their New York correspondents; that when the hotel people, for some extraordinary reason known only to themselves, demanded immediate payment, he had been practically penniless, and had walked out in a rage, leaving everything, even his overcoat. Not only did he keep the secret of his real name and title, but he did not think it necessary to mention either his failure to get in at houses where he had left letters of introduction or his encounter with Mr. Milton. Yet, glibly as the story ran, it seemed to the daughter of Alexander the Great like a fairy tale.

She, with quick feminine instinct, recognised the vast social distance between "Mr. Gordon" and Bill Willing more poignantly than did Bill himself, who had now almost forgotten it in friendly association. But even so, to have sitting at one of her father's marble-topped tables, hungrily eating a breakfast on her invitation, a young man who could engage a cabin on the *Mauretania* and a suite at the Waldorf-Astoria, appeared like a brilliant dream. She had never before seen

anyone quite so gallant and aristocratic-looking as Bill Willing's friend; no, not even when she walked Fifth Avenue on Easter Sunday at the hour of Church parade; and she was distressed at the thought that she would soon lose the wondrous visitor forever. She longed desperately to attach him to herself in some way, but could not see the way.

Eagerly she began to plan a course of action, thrusting Bill's advice aside. What was Bill that he should give advice? she asked scornfully—for Bill had never looked into her languishing eyes, and he was to her a mere painting-machine, scarcely a man at all. What did Bill know of uptown, and the ways of swells? But, she intimated, she had some knowledge of smart life. She had friends, Mr. and Mrs. Rosenstein, who were rich (though indeed no richer than Pa) and sometimes she dined with them at their flat in One Hundred and Fifty-third Street, or went to an uptown theatre in their company. Therefore she was competent to advise and to say "what was what."

She offered to send a District Messenger to the Waldorf-Astoria for the telegram Mr. Gordon was expecting, and any letters which might have arrived. "He can bring you the lot," she arranged, "and then you can send him to your bank, unless they make you show up to be identified. Anyhow, you can wait here for news. You can go on sitting where you are, or you can come and stay by me at the desk, if the tables fill up with folks for breakfast."

Loveland's face slowly reddened, and his eyes grew troubled.

"You needn't mind about the money for the messenger," she said quickly. "You can pay me back afterwards, if you're so awful proud."

"Why, of course I'd pay you back," Val assured her. "But—er—the fact is——" he hesitated, trying to find a way out of the tangled web "Mr. Gordon" had woven—"the fact is, I"—(he wondered if he could bear to go to the hotel and thus escape the difficulty about the name; but pictured himself arriving in evening dress by broad daylight, and felt his gorge rise at the degradation). "The fact is, anything coming for me at the Waldorf will have on it the name of Loveland. 'The Marquis of Loveland' will be the address on my letters."

"My goodness! you *did* fly high!" exclaimed Isidora, dimpling. "I guess it's no wonder they gave you a whole suite (she pronounced it 'soot') of rooms. But that's all right. You put on a card what you want the messenger boy should do, and you needn't be afraid to trust him. These little fellers are safe as banks."

With this, the first paying customer arrived, demanding beefsteak and apple pie for breakfast. Then, as if he had given the signal, others poured after him, all in a hurry, but all good-natured, and all bolting their meals (meals composed, it seemed to Val, of the most extraordinary dishes) with such incredible speed that the Englishman was startled. By the time he had finished writing his instructions, and a uniformed youth had darted off with them, almost the whole first contingent of breakfasters had gone, and given place to another.

Alexander the Great's clients consisted apparently of respectable employés of lower middle-class business houses. If they had not all been employed, Loveland reflected, they would not have been in such desperate haste; but then he had not yet studied the American temperament, north of "Dixie."

Bill Willing's habit was, when paid for his day's work, to find a seat in a small adjacent park and play with the children whose out-door nursery it was. There by witchcraft or wizardry his money was frequently wheedled from his pocket; and often by the time he returned to Alexander the Great's for early dinner, he was practically a pauper. It was after such conjuring tricks that he migrated at nightfall to his "country estate," as he called Central Park, and got through the hours as best he could, till half-past six next morning.

Today, however, he was encouraged to linger in the warm restaurant, Alexander's daughter being supreme in authority during her father's absence. Isidora saw that Bill had the food he liked best for breakfast; a steaming pile of buckwheat cakes trimmed round the edges with crisp brown lace, and oozing syrup at every pore. Also she sent him a copy of "New York Light" without having even glanced at the front page, although a "gentleman friend" who had paid her a great deal of attention last summer was at the beginning of his trial for a really exciting murder.

Isidora dreaded, yet longed, to see the messenger return, and at sight of the slim figure in blue bobbing past the big window she started so violently as to cover the floor with an avalanche of waiters' checks which had littered her father's desk.

The youth entered the restaurant and went straight to the table where "Mr. Gordon" still sat. Isidora could not hear a word of the conversation which ensued, but from under her eyelashes she contrived to see, without seeming to see, how the messenger shook his head in answer to questions, and how Mr. Gordon's face grew ever more blank until it hardened into an expression of hopelessness. She was sure that the boy had brought neither letter nor telegram, and that something had gone very wrong indeed with her mysterious guest's calculations.

An inspiration prompted her hastily to beckon Bill, who was earning the continued hospitality of the restaurant by trotting in with clean plates from the kitchen and trotting back with dirty ones.

"Here, take this, and pay the messenger," she whispered. "I guess your friend's had a disappointment."

Bill obeyed, but did not at once come back. When the youth had been paid, and had shot away up

the street as if through a pneumatic tube, Bill lingered in consultation with the pale young man at the table.

"Something's up," Isidora said to herself, in an agony of curiosity. But what the "something" was, she could not find out till breakfast was over, and the room clear of customers.

It was by this time after nine, a late hour at Alexander the Great's restaurant, which the regular clients were deserting now for business; but others might drop in for a piece of pie at any moment, so Isidora caught at a propitiously quiet instant as she would have flown at a moving electric tram.

"The cable I expected hasn't arrived," explained P. Gordon. "It's all right, of course, when I come to think of it, and I'm not really worried, for I haven't paid enough attention to the difference of time between London and New York. I must send again later in the day, when there will be letters, too, perhaps, and people's visiting-cards. Meanwhile——"

"Meanwhile, stay where you are, and make yourself at home," cut in Isidora, hospitably. Nevertheless, she was anxious when she thought of her father, and the inevitable moment of his coming downstairs, heavy-footed with illness, and "cross as a bear with a sore head." Pa would want to have the beautiful young man in evening clothes satisfactorily explained, and it was borne in upon the girl that he would be rather difficult to explain. Non-paying people and things were always difficult to explain to Alexander, especially when he was under the weather. But—there was one way out of the scrape, and Isidora snatched at it suddenly with a leap of the heart. All might be well should she prevail upon Mr. Gordon to accept another loan from her—if he liked to call it a loan!

She had been saving up her allowance to buy a new ball-dress, and had already set her heart on the thing she would have. But she would deplete the sum by a third for Mr. Gordon's sake, if he would take the money and spend it as if it were his own, "for the good of the house." If he indulged in pickled clams or pumpkin-pie, or cold fried oysters, at intervals of, say every hour, under her father's eye, he would continue to be welcome to his place for an indefinite length of time, even though costume and conduct might appear open to curious criticism.

"Thank you, but Mr. Willing has given me a piece of good advice," said Val. "If it hadn't been for him, I shouldn't have thought of it, perhaps. He suggests my pawning a few things I have on me."

Now was Isidora's time to speak, and she offered her alternative suggestion, but with some stammering and confusion under the growing discouragement in Mr. Gordon's dark blue eyes. Nor did he let her stumble on very far. As soon as he gathered the drift of her faltering words, he broke in, thanking her sincerely, saying that she was most awfully kind, but he couldn't trespass any further upon her goodness. According to Willing, there was a pawnshop just round the corner. They two would go there immediately; and then, with money to pay his debt to her, as well as tide over unforeseen delays, he would be glad to come back for a time.

Not only had Isidora never seen a man like Mr. Gordon, but she had never heard any man talk as he did, unless perhaps on the stage. She could hardly believe yet that he was not an actor, and that the 'Marquis of Loveland' was not the name of some character he had played.

It needs hardihood to show oneself at nine o'clock of a cold, sunshiny morning in evening clothes. Loveland had not by any means got rid of his vanity with his other possessions, and he would rather have "run the gauntlet" at the risk of his life from cowboy bullets or Indian arrows, than face the grins and stares of a downtown New York crowd.

This time Bill did offer his overcoat, and press the offer, but to do Loveland justice, its shabbiness and inadequacy were not his principal reasons for refusing. Bill's "blazer" was not much warmer than tissue paper, its sole virtue, save on a hot day of summer, being the fact that it would cover a "dickey" and celluloid cuffs that had no visible means of support.

Luckily for Loveland's fortitude, however, the ordeal—or the out-of-doors part of it—was brief. He was whisked round the corner, and hurried mercifully into a dingy den which Bill Willing seemed to regard as a kind of "home from home," or, at the least, a cold-storage warehouse.

Loveland denuded his shirt of studs, took the gold links out of his cuffs, and produced his watch, asking almost humbly how much would be allowed for the lot.

The watch was of gun-metal; the sleeve links, the simplest he had owned, were destitute of precious stones; and the pawnbroker having examined the offered objects with an air of disparagement, mentioned the sum of nine dollars. When urged to make a higher bid, he remarked that he was "no Santa Claus," and at last showed himself so indifferent that Loveland was glad to exchange his despised belongings for one dollar less than the sum at first refused.

"I expect the old Curmudge will be on for his scene by the time we get back," said Bill, as they returned to Alexander the Great's after an absence of nearly an hour, during which time Loveland had provided his shirt-front with cheap celluloid studs.

But "Curmudge"—alias Mr. Solomon, alias Alexander—was still absent. His understudy, Izzie of the almond-eyes, continued to reign alone over a kingdom of marble-topped tables and empty red chairs awaiting their next occupants; but sixty minutes had changed her oddly. She looked up with a nervous start when Loveland came in with Bill, and hid in her lap the newspaper which had been lying before her on the desk.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE MORNING PAPER

"I shall be able to pay you for my breakfast and the messenger now," said Loveland. "And if you've a private room, I'd like to engage it till afternoon, when I can send to the hotel again, and find the cable telling me how and where to get the money on my letter of credit. It's rather awkward being here in these clothes, and——"

"We haven't got a private room," replied the girl, "except our own parlour. I wish we had, because—because I guess you're just about right. You *oughtn't* to be here, today, sitting around dressed that way. You might be noticed, and—and——" She hesitated, then began to speak again quickly, in a low voice. "See here, Mr.—Mr. Gordon. I don't know but I'd better tell you something. Bend down; I don't want the waiters to hear. Dutchy don't catch onto English much, but folks always understand when you don't want 'em to. Of course it's all right about Bill, as he's your friend. I suppose he *knows*?"

"Knows what?" enquired Val, bending down towards her as she had asked, his elbows on the counter, while Bill tactfully retired out of earshot.

"Why—it's—it's in the paper; this morning's 'Light.'"

"Oh!" The blood sprang to Val's face, his scar showing very white. No need, it seemed, for further questions. He thought he knew what Miss Isidora Alexander had been reading in the paper, and cursed himself for having uttered the name of Loveland. If he had not told her that enquiries must be made at the Waldorf for Lord Loveland's cablegram and letters, she would not associate Mr. Gordon, Bill Willing's friend, with the hero of "New York Light's" story.

That cad, Milton, had evidently made up some tale, on recovering his disgusting senses, a tale not too damaging to himself, and had named his assailant.

"Give me the paper, please," Val demanded.

"Not now," said the girl. "Dutchy's looking, and that, silly boy, Blinkey, has just come in. I don't know as Dutchy reads English, and 'tain't likely Blinkey bothers about the news, even when he gets time. But you never can tell. They may have read, and they may be putting things together already. Better not let 'em guess we're alludin' to anything in the paper."

"Is it about my knocking a man down?" asked Loveland.

"Yes, a swell, well known in s'ciety. I've seen his name often in 'Town Chat.' And it's about you at the hotel, too——"

Suddenly it seemed to Val that he would not have the heart to read that article about himself in the newspapers. His sensitive vanity sent a sharp twinge through his body, as if a nerve had been touched with the point of a knife. That scene of his humiliation in the Waldorf Restaurant, and afterwards in the hall! how could he bear to see it all set out in vulgar print, accompanied perhaps by an "interview" with the hotel employé who had turned him into the street? No, he could not look at the paper, could not see himself held up to public ridicule—probably by the pen of the man he had ordered from his door with Cadwallader Hunter yesterday in the morning.

Physically, Loveland was not a coward; but touch his vanity and he shrank as if with fear, and, mortified to the quick, as his imagination pictured the amusement his plight must be at this moment creating round thousands of breakfast tables, he broke in upon the girl's revelations, almost roughly. "Never mind—that part now," he said. "That's nothing. Has the man Milton set the police on me?"

"Nope. I guess not. There's a kind of interview with him in the paper, and he says he deserved what he got for havin' anything to do with a man of your sort. He says after he'd told you exactly what he thought of you, you hit him from behind; which I don't believe, because you ain't that kind, I'll bet——"

"Thank you," said Loveland, looking so handsome in the pallor of his anger that the Jewish girl could not take her eyes from his face. Her sensuous temperament made her adore beauty, of which she saw little in her everyday life. It was because she loved beauty and colour that she chose red and other vivid-hued dresses for herself. Because she loved beauty she studied fashion-plates, and pinched in her plump waist to what she considered perfect elegance of form. Because she loved beauty and thought she was attaining it, she covered her smooth polished skin with pearl powder, and tortured her hair with metal curling-pins. Because she loved beauty she was now ready to fling her soul at this stranger's feet. Having read the newspaper, she believed him to be a blackguard; but she had not been taught a high standard of virtue for men; and if she had, she would still have been fiercely ready to protect this splendid scoundrel.

"No, I'm not that kind of man," Val echoed her words. "Evidently the cowardly beast must have picked himself up before he was seen, otherwise, as he was lying flat on his fat back, his story about having been hit from behind would hardly have held water. Will the police do anything on their own responsibility, do you think?"

"Not unless somebody sends them lookin' for you, I hope," Isidora reassured him, flattered that she should be taken into consultation. "This Milton says in the interview, he don't want to be mussed up in a scandal, or called on as a witness against you in a police-court."

"It's his own scandal!" broke out Loveland. "He knows I could defend myself only too well. And being a cad himself, he doesn't know that I wouldn't bring in certain names."

"Still, the hotel people may try to make trouble," the girl suggested. "It was so early when the messenger got there, p'raps they hadn't read the papers, because if they had, they could have followed the boy here, if they wanted."

"I shall have to send again for the cablegram, no matter what happens," said Val. "I must get money."

"Sure you *can* get it?" Isidora asked in a confidential, yet somewhat doubtful, tone.

"Of course I'm sure. I have my letter of credit—the one thing I did manage to keep."

"Yes, but——"

"There isn't any but," cut in Loveland, impatiently. "It's certain to be all right this afternoon, at latest. The cable will have come to the hotel, and then I shall know what to do. Even supposing the police should arrest me for that affair—well, at worst, the trouble ought to be over and done with in a day or two."

"Oh, indeed it wouldn't," exclaimed the pretty Jewess. "I don't know what mightn't happen to you. You *will* be careful, won't you—if it's only to please me?" And her eyes were large and beseeching.

"You're very kind to take an interest," said Val, really grateful, though he had to restrain an impulse to draw back from her advances. "Of course I don't want to be let in for a scandal which might do others harm as well as me—and would, if that beast Milton could manage it. I'm not exactly pining to see the inside of a New York gaol—which you seem to think I'm in danger of doing. Things are bad enough, as it is." And his face darkened, for he thought that, after the loathsome publicity the newspapers were now giving the name of Loveland, he might have difficulty in bringing down such game as he had crossed the sea to seek. Also, he remembered with a pang Lesley Dearmer's prophecy that the Louisville journals would reprint New York gossip.

"Oh, I'm sorry you think things here are so bad," retorted Isidora, flushed and pouting.

"You know I don't mean things here," protested Val, with less truth than politeness. "You're too good to me, and I appreciate it all immensely."

"Do you?" she asked, her eyes liquid.

"Of course I do. I hope I shall be able to prove that before long."

She blushed. To her mind, there was only one way in which a young man could prove that he appreciated a girl's goodness to him: by making love to her. And she could almost have fainted with joy at the thought of what it would be to have this glorious hero—villain though he might be—as a lover. Already she had a dim yet intoxicating vision of herself a bride in white silk (or should it be cream satin?) and a wreath of artificial orange blossoms amid clouds of tulle. There would be difficulties—a hundred difficulties, of which the greatest was now upstairs enjoying a well-earned rest. But who cared for a love that ran smooth? And Isidora thrilled as her fancy held a spyglass up to the future.

"Well," she said, warmly, "I mean to go on being good—better—best to you; for I'm studying out a plan to get your things away from the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, and all the same to keep you out of trouble. You're a foreigner, and don't understand our ways yet, but I'll see you through all right."

"How are you going to do that, my guardian angel?" Val smiled at the pretty Jewess.

Isidora had the sensation of being bathed in perfumed cream. His "guardian angel"! She had been called a number of nice things, such as a "real beaut," a high-flyer and a Floradora; but no one had ever hailed her as his guardian angel before, and with all her heart she vowed that she would live up to the name.

"I don't know exactly yet how I'll do it," she admitted. "But you leave it to me, and it'll be done, you'll see. Only give me an order signed 'Loveland,' to bring away anything of yours from the hotel. Meantime, I've thought of one thing, which is, you'd better not be seen here till we're sure they ain't onto you, through that messenger boy. I tell you what; I've got a lady friend in this street, Mrs. Johnny Gernsbacher, who's lookin' after an empty house that's for rent."

"A caretaker?" asked Loveland.

"I guess that's right. Me and Mrs. Gernsbacher's good friends. She's a widow lady, quite old, 'most forty-five, so she'll do for a chaperon. Pa had her boy here once to wait, and then through me and friends of mine he got a better job outside. She'd be glad to do me a good turn. You can see to things here for five minutes till I run across and ask if she'll let you stay there in the house, as a friend of mine, till you have time to look around."

"I—see to things?" echoed Loveland, blankly.

"Yes. If anybody comes in, they'll take you for a swell waiter, in those clothes. They'll think Alexander the Great's startin' in for uptown style."

She laughed with amusement at the joke, and Loveland laughed, too, though not very heartily. He was not enchanted at the idea of being mistaken for a "swell waiter," but beggars must not be choosers, and he offered no objection to the plan.

Wrapping over her head a red crocheted scarf which she called a "fascinator," Isidora darted into the street, panting with haste lest the worst should happen in her absence, and her father take it into his head to come downstairs. But she had seen him last dozing over the Police News, in a quilted home-made dressing-gown, and that was such a short time ago that she hardly thought there was danger of a surprise.

Mrs. Gernsbacher must have been very accessible and easily persuaded, for in less than ten minutes the girl was back again, flushed with triumph. "It's all right," she announced. "Beccy G's standing in the basement door, waiting for you to pop in. Bill, you show him the way to Beccy's. Goodbye, Mr. Gordon. Don't stay here another minute. I'll be over as soon as I can, to tell you what's up—and I'll send Bill along at noon with something good for your dinner."

Carried off his feet by her enthusiasm, Loveland did not stop for further argument. Caught by an eddy in the tide of fate, he let himself be swept away.

CHAPTER TWENTY

A BACK NUMBER

Nothing had happened when Bill Willing came at half-past twelve, to find Loveland an inappropriately ornamental figure, keeping guard in Mrs. Gernsbacher's kitchen during that lady's absence on a shopping expedition: nothing had happened worth reporting, except that Alexander the Great was "around again."

Isidora had sent, wrapped in a Japanese paper napkin, a ham-sandwich, and a generous slice of pumpkin-pie, a delicacy strange to the Englishman's palate. Bill had brought food for himself, too (that part of his wage which he took out in kind), preferring a cold picnic meal with his friend to the hot meat and potatoes he might have had at the restaurant. He also was provided with pie and a sandwich, and though his portion was smaller than Isidora's surreptitious gift to "Mr. Gordon," he had smuggled in his pocket a bottle of ginger ale for both.

"Have you read the beastly newspaper article about me?" Val forced himself to enquire.

"No," answered Bill, "I ain't seen it. Miss Izzie offered me the paper, but I—well, I didn't care to read it. Seemed as if 'twould sorter be spying on you, behind your back."

"You're a good fellow," said Val. It was a new idea, only born to him last night, that a shabby waif like Bill—a mere autumn leaf, blown here and there by contrary winds of circumstance—could be a "good fellow," with the heart of a man. But here was such a one. And it seemed to Lord Loveland that the leaf was very like a gentleman.

"I don't see where the goodness comes in," protested Bill, modestly. "But I can run back and sneak the paper, if you've changed your mind and want a squint at it."

"No, thank you," said Val; though he half scorned himself for moral cowardice. "I've no wish to see how deep New York journalism has pushed me into the mud."

Bill, who did not wish to be overheard gossiping about his friend's affairs by the returning Mrs. Gernsbacher, potted away after the meal, promising to run in later with a message from "Miss Izzie," if the young lady were prevented from coming in person. If Isidora had mapped out a definite plan, she had not confided it to Bill, but he had little doubt that her idea would "pan out all right, because she was a mighty smart girl when she set her wits to work."

Some hours passed, and Loveland became as restless as a caged lion lately imported from his native desert. It was only his horror of vague atrocities which might be perpetrated by the New York police—horrors such as he had read or heard of—which restrained him from rushing out of his dreary hiding place, even at the price of being hooted in his evening clothes, in the full glare of noonday. After all, he said to himself, bitterly, those who might see him perambulating Twelfth Street, thus unsuitably clad, would only do as Isidora had suggested—"take him for a swell waiter." But he did not like that dark, haunting vision of the police, and constrained himself to patience.

Rebecca Gernsbacher returned from her morning's shopping to ask almost as many questions as she drew breaths, freezing into a cold statue of suspicion as her mysterious guest froze into reticence. Not having heard the name of Loveland, she did not associate any sensational headlines in the morning paper with Isidora's "swell mash," but there was no crime between pocket picking and murder of which she did not believe the handsome, sulky fugitive easily

capable.

Loveland had parted with his watch, but there was a battered "one day Bee" clock in Mrs. Gernsbacher's untidy kitchen, and he had begun to tell himself gloomily, that it would soon be too late to draw money from any bank, when Isidora appeared in great splendour at the basement door. She had on a large picture hat of red velvet, nodding with cheap ostrich plumes which shaded from palest pink to deepest magenta; and in her "electric seal" coat she looked as little like a lady as a beautiful girl could possibly look. But she was enchanted with herself—and evidently expected to impress Loveland by her taste and elegance.

"Well!" she panted, having kissed her friend Beccy, and dusted off a chair with the big muff which matched her cloak. "Well, I've got news for you, Mr. Gordon. Guess what it is."

Val was in no mood for graceful badinage, but he forced himself to reply smilingly that he could not guess, and was anxious to hear. "I began to think you were never coming," he added; which remark was more flattering to Isidora than to Mrs. Gernsbacher.

The girl, pleased at his impatience, which made her conscious of her own importance, gaily plunged into her narrative: what she had done, and why she had been so long in doing it.

In the first place, Pa had been cross, and hadn't wanted her to go out; but when she had teased, he had only grumbled a little, and directly after dinner—before Bill came back—she had taken an "L" train downtown, to consult the husband of a great friend of hers. This gentleman she had persuaded to leave business—he being a tobacco merchant—and to drop in at the Waldorf-Astoria, with the object of making certain enquiries. She had not, she said, confided any secrets to her friend, though she was sure she might have done so safely, but had merely pleaded a passionate yearning for further details of the "story" in "New York Light." What were the hotel people going to do? Were they searching for the Englishman, and if so, had they got upon his track?

Mr. Rosenstein being an occasional customer of the Waldorf bar, when he "had on his gladdest rags and was out to do himself well," did not hesitate to undertake the mission. He went to the hotel and asked questions without arousing any suspicion that he was actuated by a deeper motive than idle curiosity, and he learned that the staff of the Waldorf-Astoria took but little interest in the gentleman calling himself Lord Loveland. The Englishman had gone away without paying for his rooms, as the newspapers had said, the hotel people admitted, but goods worth about the amount owing had been left behind. Possibly the owner would redeem the things; and if not, it was a matter of no great importance to the hotel, which was full of other clients and of other business. Anything that might have happened, anything of which the Englishman might be accused, did not concern the Waldorf-Astoria, now that he was no longer a resident of the hotel, and employés had been instructed not to gossip either in his favour or disfavour. Besides, a good deal of water had run through the mill since his eviction, and the late Lord Loveland was now shelved as a "Back Number."

Having got this information, passed on from Mr. Rosenstein, Isidora had felt safe in attempting her *coup d'état*. Bidding her obliging friend goodbye with thanks, she went herself to the Waldorf-Astoria. Assuming the air of a Duchess (as she conceived it) she showed to a clerk the paper given her by Loveland, and signed by him. At the same time she mentioned haughtily that she was a friend of the gentleman's, and had dropped in for his mail.

There was no mail, had come the laconic answer; no cablegram; no letters; no visiting cards; and nobody had called with the exception of two or three newspaper men.

Loveland's heart was cold as iron, and as heavy, when Isidora's story had reached this climax. Difference in time could no longer account for the London bank's failure in replying to his wire of yesterday. There was some other reason for silence—some strange, sinister reason connected, no doubt, with the attitude of the New York cashier twenty-four hours ago. Val asked himself insistently what that reason might be, and could get no answer, although various disturbing conjectures flitted through his brain. He thought of the debts he had left behind in London, and wondered if any of his creditors could possibly be responsible for the mysterious trouble which had attacked him simultaneously from both sides of the world.

And nobody had called or written! This lack of courtesy showed, to his mind, that Jim's and Betty's friends had all read the newspapers, and had taken his affair with Milton in bad part. The man Milton was to blame for the scandal, which had doubtless been spread by Cadwallader Hunter's journalist friend, in revenge for a snub. Cadwallader Hunter's malice, too, must have been another match to light the fire of mischief; and taking everything together, Loveland began to fear that the game in America was up. He hated to fail, hated to be thwarted—pushed back with brutal violence from the very threshold of success; but it was all too sordid, too humiliating for a gentleman to contend against. He began to tell himself that the dignified course was to turn his back on America and march homeward with flags flying as if he had suffered no defeat. Yes, that was what he would do. It would be disgracing himself and his name, to go down and wrestle in the arena with enemies who did not pretend to fight fair. Yet—to leave this country for ever, with no hope of seeing Lesley Dearmer again! She had not even given him her address, and had only laughed elusively when he suggested "calling on her some day, after everything was comfortably settled." He knew no more than that she lived "near Louisville," therefore he could not write to beg that she would not believe any hateful tales the newspapers might invent. Oh, yes, it was all over—that, little episode, which had been so sweet, which had taught him that he

had heart enough to love and long for a woman, because of what she was, not because of what she had.

"You needn't look so broken up," said Isidora. "Wait till I come to the end of the story. I've got a messenger waitin' in the street with something for you. I wouldn't let him in, till we'd had our talk. Now I'm going to call him down, to cheer you up a bit."

She bounced off her chair, ran to the door, and shouted up from the level of the basement to the street. In another moment a uniformed youth walked in and deposited a large paper-wrapped bundle; but it was not until he had been sent away that Isidora began to open the parcel.

"I wanted to get the lot," she said, "but my, the bill was high!—way above me. I'd twenty-five dollars I'd been savin' up—oh, for something; but you needn't care. I'd a heap rather do this than buy any old thing for myself. And here's what they give me after a lot of fuss."

She tore off the brown paper with a dramatic gesture, and triumphantly displayed the suit of tweed clothing which Loveland had taken off the evening before in dressing for dinner. Then her face fell, as she saw that his expressed no pleasure.

"I thought you'd like these better than anything, as I couldn't run to all," the girl went on disappointedly.

"You paid my hotel bill!" exclaimed Loveland.

"Only a little, weeny part," Isidora broke in. "Wisht I could have done more."

"I don't," said Val, hastily. "Oh, you're very kind—too kind. I don't know what to say. But—your money, that you were saving—why, I—Jove! it's horrible. And I mayn't be able to pay you back for days."

"I don't want you to pay me back," the girl said proudly. "It's been a pleasure."

Loveland's heart reproached him. He had shuddered a little at the thought that this gaudy young beauty in flaunting feathers and cheap finery had gone to the Waldorf claiming him as her "gentleman friend." But it was a thought far less palatable that she should spend her savings for him. He was grateful—more grateful than he would have known how to be yesterday, to a person not of his own class—yet gratitude was not now his strongest emotion.

He thanked her as best he could for all she had done, and talked down her objections to being repaid. Now, he said, owing to her kindness he could walk the streets without being stared at, and would lose no time in cabling to his mother. Oh, he had plenty of money for that! and smiling as if it were part of a huge joke, he showed what the payment of his small debt to the restaurant had left of his eight dollars.

Seven dollars and a bit—nearly thirty shillings! Why, he was rich. All he asked now, was a room in which to change his clothes.

As there was a houseful of empty rooms, this request was easily granted; and presently Loveland came back to the kitchen suitably clad for daylight—except for the detail of his necktie. He would have given a good deal for a change of linen; but there was no use in crying for the moon. And Isidora saw no fault in his appearance as she walked proudly at his side, on the way to send a cablegram to Scotland.

Secretly, Loveland would have been glad to dispense with her company, but she assured him that she had "more time than anything else," and that she would be delighted to guide him. Only, they "mustn't go past home, for if Pa saw her with a strange gentleman, there'd be trouble."

Isidora peered over her companion's shoulder, as he wrote out his message to his mother, and was much interested in the address. To save expense, he put only "Loveland, Dorloch, North Britain," therefore the girl's curiosity was not greatly rewarded. All she could say to herself was that, apparently, he had some right to the name of Loveland, and that he really did seem to expect that "somebody over there" might send him a remittance. Otherwise why should he waste good money on a cablegram, and without a code, too?

Loveland had not written to his mother since his change of plan about the ships. But after all, he said to himself, it did not matter. He was always a bad correspondent—always had been—and the mater just put up with it, poor dear. She wouldn't be worrying anyway, as she must suppose him to be on the high seas at this moment, a passenger on the *Baltic*—unless she had heard from Betty or Jim—an improbable contingency. Even if he had sent off a letter directly after landing, she would not get it for days yet, so his negligence had done no harm. As for the Marconigram Jim had suggested—why, as things had turned out, it was as well he hadn't wasted money on it.

Unfortunately, to make his need of money clear, Val was obliged to write a long message, even though he attempted no elaborate explanation, beyond saying: "Don't believe newspaper canards." When he had finished, and did not see his way to striking out a single word, he was vexed to find that he would have to pay six dollars and fifty cents. Still, his mother would instantly send the fifty pounds he asked for, even if she had to borrow, and in a few hours this hideous situation would be ended. He could pay all he owed; and then, if there were no hope of anything good in America, he would take passage on the first homeward bound ship.

Isidora advised him to give as an address the house where Mrs. Gernsbacher was caretaker, as

embarrassing questions might be asked by Pa if an answer came to the restaurant. She was afraid that Mr. Gordon would have to "chum up" with Bill again for the night, if he were determined not to accept a little loan from her; and she was grieved to think of the boring evening he would have to spend.

It would be fun, she thought, if he would "just drop in at the restaurant like a stranger," and have some supper, which would cost him as little there as anywhere, since he was bent on paying. But Loveland made an excuse which pleased her so much that she relinquished the plan almost without a pang. It would be difficult, he said, after all her goodness, to treat her like an entire stranger. He said this carelessly, but to her it meant a great deal—so much, that she went straight home almost as happy as if he had been by her side.

With his evening clothes under his arm (the first time in his life, perhaps, that he had carried a parcel larger than a letter), Loveland found his way back to the Bowery, back to the Bat Hotel, back to his friend Bill, who was already in the reading room. And once again the name of "P. Gordon" figured humbly among the hundred and fifty lodgers for that night.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE MAN WHO WAITS

There came no cablegram from Scotland next day. Loveland's mother did not answer his appeal. But Val tried to persuade himself that this was not strange. Perhaps she could not get together such a sum as he had asked for, without a little delay, but she would send as soon as possible. He was sure of that as he was sure that his present address ought to be First Circle, Hades.

The dollar which remained to him after sending his expensive cry across the sea, was gone. He borrowed of Bill Willing, who offered and was delighted to lend. In a day or two at most, Loveland said, he would repay, and planned to give Bill a handsome present as well. Meanwhile Loveland passed his time miserably between Alexander the Great's and the Bat Hotel, or walking the streets in the desperate hope of seeing some English face he knew. He saw many pleasant faces, to whom no appeal of sorrow would be made in vain. But they were strangers' faces, and he was not a beggar yet.

He had bought with Bill's money—an advance from Alexander—two or three collars, a change of linen, and a dark necktie, therefore he looked smart and prosperous enough in his tweed suit to pass muster in a crowd, the absence of an overcoat seeming a mere eccentricity. Perhaps there were men who envied the handsome young Englishman who strolled past them with a jaunty, leisured air, while they were forced to hurry. But he would have given a good deal for the need of hurry.

Four days dragged by, including one ghastly Sunday; and when there was still no word from Lady Loveland, Val began to feel the heavy conviction that none would ever come. Some awful spell had fallen upon him, it seemed, a curse which made him a pariah even for those who loved him best. It had begun with Foxham's treachery; and now it had come to his mother's neglect. What might follow, he could not guess; he would rather not try to guess.

He thought over his past, and realised that he had been selfish; but he did not feel that he had ever done anything which deserved such a punishment as this, if punishment it were—if there were a God who watched the children of the earth, and punished, or rewarded, their deeds. Never before had it occurred to him to pity others, beyond a "poor old chap, so sorry, don't you know," and a quick forgetting; but now he was filled with a dumb sympathy for everyone who suffered. Above this bright, gay city—the gayest and brightest Val had ever known—it seemed that his eyes had gained a magic keenness to see the smoke of human suffering rise like incense, to the clear remoteness of the sky.

Loveland did not always take his meals at Alexander's. Sometimes he let a meal-time pass, too deeply depressed to be hungry; or if Bill Willing insisted on food for both, there were places where it could be obtained even more cheaply than at Alexander the Great's—when Alexander himself, and not Isidora, was behind the counter.

Val had met the "Boss" now, though not officially. While he had a few dimes and nickels in his pocket, he patronised the restaurant, glad to have a glimpse of Isidora's friendly, pretty face, and a chance to warm himself at the glowing stove. The "Boss" regarded him as a client—a "queer cuss," down on his luck, but worth being civil to, for in New York you never knew how men's fortunes might change.

Nevertheless, Loveland realised that Alexander had as much real kindness of heart for the world in general as Shylock, or a tiger. He had his friends, perhaps—for tigers may have friends, in their native jungle, if there be no question of a carcass to divide; but when most sleek and smiling, there was something vaguely terrible about the fat Jew. Wake the tiger in him from its sleep of purring prosperity, and it would spring, tearing and rending with unsheathed claws the creature who had roused it.

Isidora, thought Loveland, must resemble her mother, who, it appeared, was long ago dead; and

maybe that was one reason why the fierce-eyed Jew loved the girl so jealously, as a tiger loves its young, or as Shylock loved Jessica. She had something of his Hebraic cast of feature, although he had taken a Christian wife; but nothing could be less like the hawk-eye, with its fierce glance suddenly unveiled, the cruel nose, and the big rapacious mouth of the gross, elderly man, than the langourous beauty of the young girl.

His father had been a German Jew, but he—once Isaac Solomon, now Alexander the Great—had been born in the slums of New York, and had fought his way up, biting, clawing, or fawning, whichever seemed the wisest course. Now he was growing rich. He was proud of his own portrait on the walls, in the battle-paintings, proud of the queer pictorial menus and smart advertising cards which helped to make the success of the venture in which he had risked his capital; but he acknowledged no debt of gratitude to Bill Willing's ingenuity, and would have sacked the artist the moment he ceased to be useful. He decried the value of Bill's work; he bullied his two black cooks and his ill-paid waiters; nor had his prosperity given him any fellow feeling for others, who, like himself, were struggling to reach the top.

If you deserved to get on, you got on, and devil take the hindmost, was Alexander's motto. But he loved and admired Isidora, and though he grumbled when she asked for money, secretly his chief joy in piling up a fortune was for her future, that she might marry well and hand his name on, for posthumous honours. He had already picked out the bridegroom, a young Jew with goggle eyes, a turned up moustache, and glittering black hair; a fondness for celluloid collars and red neckties; a smooth manner with his prospective father-in-law, and a truculent front for his inferiors. The young man was making "good money" as a "drummer" for a firm of Jewish tobacco merchants, but there was a slight "tache" upon his parentage, and he would be willing to take Alexander's name, on marrying Alexander's daughter. Bye-and-bye, when years from now Alexander might wish to retire on his pies and fried oysters, as other heroes had retired on their laurels, Leo Cohen would, with Isidora, carry on the restaurant and its glory from generation to generation.

This was Alexander's dream, and woe unto him who should try to interfere with its fulfilment! But he had no fear of any such dangerous person, even when Leo was away drumming up interest for a certain firm in the West, and a tall, handsome, sulky-looking young Englishman was dropping in every day for cheap food and a smile from Isidora.

If Loveland had had money, he would have sent off other cablegrams, but he soon came down to his last copper; and Bill, though willing by nature as by name, seldom had in his best days more to lend him than fifteen cents at a time.

On the fifth day the situation passed beyond bearing. Not only was Loveland penniless, but he could not bring himself to borrow more of Bill's pitiful nickels and hard-earned dimes. Each one of those coins was more to Bill than a sovereign (usually someone else's sovereign) had been to Lord Loveland in his palmy days. The thing couldn't go on; and so Val was saying to Bill as the two drank hot coffee (at Bill's expense) standing up before the counter at Alexander the Great's on the fifth morning after Loveland's arrival in New York.

It was not quite seven o'clock, but Bill had finished his work on the "meenoos," and had invited P. Gordon to "stoke his furnace" at an expenditure of two cents.

Alexander, who had presided at a political ward meeting the night before, had not yet come down to growl at his man-servant, his maid-servant, and all within his gates. "Dutchy" had been discharged with violence the night before, because he had drowned his vast homesickness in unlimited beer, and "Blinkey" was the only member of the household on view except the black cook Dick and Dick's assistant.

"Bill, I can't stand this any longer. I shall have to work or steal—anything but borrow more—until I can touch my money," Loveland broke out, when Blinkey had disappeared behind the red curtain and was being harangued in the distance by big Dick.

"It ain't easy to do either in New York," said Bill, mildly.

"To think of my being practically reduced to starvation and nakedness, with a letter of credit for a hundred and fifty pounds in my pocket!" groaned Val. "Do you think old Alexander would advance me anything if I told him my whole story?"

"Oh, I guess I wouldn't tell him the story," Bill advised, hastily.

"Why not?"

"Well, he's got a sharp tongue, Alexander has."

"In England such a fellow could only get at me at all through my servants."

"I—suppose so," agreed Bill, gently. "But this ain't England."

"I should think it wasn't, worse luck."

"You do have bad luck," said Bill. "But 'twouldn't change it if you asked Alexander for a loan on that letter of credit. If he said anything fit for publication, he'd only say, if the bank wouldn't accommodate you, he wouldn't; and what the dickens did you take him for? When I want a quarter before it's due, it's like gettin' milk out of a corkscrew; and the one thing he thinks of, is whether I shall get run over by an automobile before I work out the money next morning. Oh, I know Alexander."

"What's Pa been up to now?" pertly demanded the voice of Pa's fair daughter.

Isidora had come in while the two were so deeply occupied in conversation and the dregs in their coffee cups, that they had not seen her lift the curtain.

Since the day of her first introduction to P. Gordon, she had not appeared at this early hour of the morning. Her father was generally at his post, and when he was there, Isidora was supposed to exist not for use, but for ornament. However, she knew that Alexander was now reposing after last night's eloquence, and she had taken advantage of his absence. This time she was not in wrapper and curling pins. She had dressed herself with great care for the day, having learned from the "hired girl" that Bill Willing's "swell friend" had come in with him.

"What's Pa been up to now, I say?" she asked again, before the startled and mortified Bill could answer.

"Oh, nothing," replied the artist, apologetically. "We was just talkin'."

"I was wondering if he would advance me anything, enough to get back to England with—on my letter of credit?" Loveland frankly explained.

Isidora's eyes dilated at Val's suggestion of going back to England. It had not occurred to her, facts being as stated in the newspapers, that he would wish to return to his own country; and as fortunately, after the first sensational paragraphs, his affairs had been crowded out of public interest by various startling events of far greater importance, she had thought that he would be thankful to "worry along" as he was.

"Get back to England!" she echoed, blankly.

"It seems the one thing to do now, if I weren't kept here by the lack of a few wretched sovereigns," said Loveland. "If your father would trust me——"

"Oh, he wouldn't!" Isidora hastened to put that idea out of P. Gordon's mind, once and for ever. "He never trusted anybody yet, and he wouldn't begin with you. Why, he says his success in life comes from never believin' anybody but himself. If a man tells him it's a nice day, he goes to the window and peeks out before takin' a walk without his umbrella. And he'd think 'twas like takin' a walk in his best clothes when it rained cats and dogs, to lend a furriner money."

"On a letter of credit?"

"Pa perfectly despises that word 'credit.'"

Loveland gave up hope of winning confidence and obtaining dollars from Alexander the Great. "This state of things is enough to make a man blow his brains out!" he exclaimed.

"I guess you need your brains now more than you ever did," suggested Bill. "And you couldn't git 'em put back where they belonged, if everything come right directly they was out. What I think of, when them ideas get to workin' in my head, is the awful long time you have to *stay* dead, whether you're suited or not. It's a lot easier to pawn your dress clothes, and see what turns up."

Before Loveland could answer Isidora clapped her pretty hands, which were much cleaner than usual since P. Gordon had come into her daily life.

"Don't pawn 'em!" she cried. "That's made me think of something. Pa's always talkin' about visible assets, or somethin' like that. Well, your dress suit might be a visible asset if—if you're really sick of life when you can't pay your way. But are you dead sure you are sick of it?"

"Dead sure!" echoed Loveland. "What have you thought of for me to do?"

"You won't be mad if I tell you?"

"What nonsense! Am I in a position to be 'mad'?—in the sense you mean—though it's a wonder I'm not mad in another sense. I'd sweep crossings if I could get the job—or break stones—if anyone wanted them broken. But I suppose you're not going to suggest one of these employments, as evening clothes wouldn't be suitable to either."

"I was thinking," said Isidora, "that—I might tease Pa to take you in—in Dutchy's place, if—you'd care about it?"

"Good Heavens! Be a waiter?" stammered Loveland. He had felt ready for any ignominious, if paying, work when in the abstract; but as soon as it took definite form—and such a form as this

"Oh! I knew you'd be cross!" Isidora pouted.

Loveland was silent; and as his dark eyebrows—so like his cousin Betty's—were drawn together in a frown, the girl supposed that he was sulking.

"I only thought it'd be better than nothing," she explained hurriedly, "if Pa'd let you; but perhaps he wouldn't. He'd think he was doin' a favour—see? He wouldn't understand how you felt about it. I'd have to explain you was temp'rily embarrassed; and my, what a howling swell of a waiter you'd look. You'd get two dollars fifty a week, to begin, and your food. That's what Dutchy did. And now and then folks give a nickel to the waiter, even in a place like this, which I suppose you turn your nose up at, after the Waldorf-Astoria. But I shan't say any more, you needn't be afraid

—"

"I beg your pardon," said Loveland. "If your father'll take me, I'll do it. When he comes—"

"Oh, you mustn't ask him yourself! You'd spoil the whole thing," Isidora broke in. "You must let me get at him. Two or three raw Germans and Swedes are bein' sent round this mornin' to look at; but while Pa's dressin' I'll talk you up, and you can be on hand when he gets downstairs. I'll go this minute, and Blinkey can see to anybody that comes in. You call him, Bill."

She darted off, all excitement; and Loveland sat waiting for the great man's verdict, feeling as if he had laid down his soul for sale with the pumpkin-pie and pork and beans.

Bill tried to cheer him. He would have practically no expenses, and being such a "good looker" would be sure to pick up a lot of nickels and even dimes. Why, he might save three dollars a week, and as for that trifling debt to him—Bill—they would wipe it off the slate and consider it paid; or, if Gordon wouldn't consent to do that, he might send the money from England when he'd got home—if he really did think it best to go home. At three dollars a week it wouldn't be long before a chap could lay up enough to cross in the steerage, the way those big ships were fighting each other for rates. For fifteen dollars you could do it, on some boats; and at three dollars a week—

But before Bill could finish his calculation—a rather intricate one for him—Isidora had flown in, her cheeks as red as her poppy-coloured blouse.

"Pa's in one of his funny moods," she whispered. "Won't give me any satisfaction. But I know he'd take you if you'd let me tell him who you are. I mean, if you're willing, I'll say you're the man all that stuff was in the papers about, how you was at the Waldorf as the Markis of Loveland, and how it was you knocked that swell Mr. Milton down. Nobody appreciates the value of advertising better than Pa (Bill can tell you that), and amatoor or no amatoor, you can be gettin' not only your two-fifty a week but twice that, and maybe more, out of Alexander the Great."

"I'd rather starve or drown myself," said Loveland, turning red, and then white.

"It's nasty, starving," ventured Bill. "And folks are that interfering, they're always fishing you out of the water and puttin' you into the newspapers as a Case. Besides, what's the odds? If you've got any swagger friends, they ain't likely to come nosin' round here. Alexander's is 'great,' but it ain't swell."

Loveland had shuddered at the thought of the steerage, when Bill suggested it a few moments ago, but now it seemed to him that the "horrors of the middle passage" would be heaven to the humiliations he endured. For fifteen dollars, Bill said, he could get back to England. If Alexander would give him five dollars a week, in three weeks he could be off—or say, four, having paid Bill what he owed. But, no, that was an eternity—not to be endured. At bay and desperate Val determined to strike high.

"Tell your father who I am, then," he exclaimed, "but say he can't have me for any beggarly two-fifty, or even five dollars a week. I'll have ten, or nothing."

Isidora looked at him with respect, and dashed away behind the curtain. Neither man spoke. The sound of her little high-heeled slippers, clicking on the uncarpeted stairs, was sharp in their ears. In three minutes—before Loveland had had time to repent—she was down again.

"Pa says 'Done,'" she panted. "He's going to use you for all you're worth."

"I bet he will," murmured Bill, *sotto voce*. But neither he nor Loveland guessed in what way Alexander the Great meant to make the "swell waiter" worth his wage.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

NEWS FROM THE GREAT WORLD

"Lesley, wasn't Loveland the name of that Lord you knew on the boat?" asked Lesley's Aunt Barbara, peering at her niece from behind an immense newspaper which hid all the upper part of her body as if with a screen.

Lesley was curled up on a sofa at the other end of the room, which had for some reason or other, more or less appropriate, been called "the library" for several generations. The girl was writing a story, which was promised for a certain time, but her heart was not in her work, and she welcomed interruptions, instead of discouraging them, as usual.

If it had been her habit to shut herself up alone for several hours a day, or if she had sat bolt upright at a desk, Mrs. Loveland would have taken Lesley's work more seriously; but when a pretty girl, looking scarcely more than a child—a girl you have seen grow up from babyhood—nestles cosily in a bank of ruffy silk cushions, with a frivolous "scribbling pad" on her knee, and a pencil in her hand, how can one realise that she is gravely pursuing literature as a profession, and must not be addressed even if one has the most exciting things to say?

Lesley did not answer at first, for she was composing her voice, that Aunt Barbara might not guess she had been taken by surprise; therefore Mrs. Loveland asked the same question over again in a louder tone.

"Yes," said Lesley. "Don't you remember my telling you his name was the same as yours?"

"There! I thought so!" exclaimed the little dovelike lady. "Only I wasn't quite sure whether you said the name was exactly the same, or *rather* like mine. You didn't talk as if you took much interest in him, and it seemed as though you would, if we'd been namesakes. I don't think you spoke of him more than once, did you?"

"I don't remember, I'm sure," replied Lesley, beginning to scrawl the name of "Loveland" aimlessly across the top of the page which ought by this time to have been covered with brilliant conversation between her hero and heroine. She answered in an indifferent tone, almost as if she were thinking of something else; but if her mind had indeed been properly bent on the story, she would have said: "Auntie, darling, I'm a thousand miles away, please, with Dick and Susanne. Don't bring me back, there's a dear!"

"Well, I'm glad you didn't take much interest in him," went on Mrs. Loveland, in a tone pregnant with mystery and importance. "I know I oughtn't to be talking to you when you're at work, and I don't often, do I?"

"Not *very* often," smiled Lesley, her dimples softening the gentle little reproach, if it were a reproach. But she didn't look up at her aunt. She pretended to be writing on; and so she was. But it was only one word, over and over again, that she wrote: "Loveland—Loveland." And her heart had begun to beat in a hurried, warning way, as often it had on shipboard when she heard Loveland's voice, and wondered if he were coming to talk to her—or to some other girl.

"But this is something really very special," Aunt Barbara apologised. "It's quite exciting. Only fancy having known him! I almost wish you'd pointed him out to me that last morning on board, when I was up on deck. It would be interesting to remember what he was like."

"Is there something about him in the paper?" asked Lesley, who had been expecting news, but would have preferred to read it herself, if she could have chosen.

"I should think there was!" exclaimed her aunt, screened behind the great printed sheets again.

"Is he engaged already?" Lesley enquired, making a sketch of Lord Loveland's profile in the midst of a speech of Dick's, though Dick was a very different sort of young man from Loveland, a very different sort indeed. How many times she had caught herself tracing the outline of those features—so clear, so straight, so perfect an outline, that it was as easy to draw as to copy a Greek statue. She knew every line, and often the little profile-portrait was there before her eyes on the paper before she knew what she had been doing. She was almost perfectly certain what Aunt Barbara's answer to her question would be. Of course he was engaged. He had hardly had time to make the acquaintance of any new girls in New York, and propose marriage, so it must be Elinor Coolidge—or Fanny Milton.

"Engaged!" echoed the elder. "No, indeed. What a mercy he's been found out before some nice girl was mixed up in the scandal. Of course he wanted——"

"A scandal!" Now at last Lesley did lift her head, quickly, and the last profile-sketch looked as if it had been struck by lightning.

"Shocking," answered Mrs. Loveland. "What a dreadful thing that our country should be looked upon as a sort of gold mine by these foreign birds of prey."

Lesley's little ears burned pink as if her aunt had boxed them. Her eyes sent out a spark, but its fire was quenched in a sudden trickle of nervous laughter. "Dear Aunt Barb! Would 'birds of prey' make successful miners?"

Aunt Barbara laughed, too. "You're always catching me up for my similes," she said. "But luckily I don't write stories, so it doesn't matter. And anyway that's what they *are*; birds of prey. As for what they do, they marry our girls, who find them out too late, and then try to get divorces. What an escape for some poor little heiress, that this creature is hoist with his own petard in the very midst of baiting his wicked trap! You needn't look at me like that, child. I don't care *how* mixed up I am. Did this man look like a gentleman?"

"Yes," said Lesley. "Naturally, because he is a gentleman."

"My dear! he must have been clever to hoodwink an observant little thing like you, who can see right down into people's hearts, even when you hardly seem to be noticing how they do their hair, or the colour of their neckties. This man is nothing but his own valet."

"So am I my own maid," said Lesley. "He never said he was rich, or——"

"I mean he isn't a Marquis."

The soft outline of the girl's figure stiffened, and she sat up very straight on the sofa.

"Who says he isn't a Marquis?" she asked sharply.

"Everybody. The newspaper."

"Oh—the newspaper!"

"But it's true. He's been turned out of his hotel. I'll read you the——"

"Please, I think I'll read it myself, if you don't mind, dear," said Lesley. "That is—when you've finished. I can wait."

"I have finished, all I care about reading," Mrs. Loveland hastened to assure her, for she invariably discovered that she has ceased to want anything which Lesley could even be suspected of wishing for.

"Take the paper, dear. Don't get up. I'll bring it to you."

But Lesley did get up, and stood with her back to her aunt as she read the Louisville version of Tony Kidd's sensational "story." She took a long time to read it, and when she had come to the end, she laid the paper on her aunt's lap without saying a word.

"Well—has it struck you dumb?" exclaimed Mrs. Loveland, disappointed: for if she spoiled Lesley with petting, Lesley spoiled her with responsiveness.

"I am rather horrified," said the girl.

"No wonder. You actually knew him—or thought you did."

"I think so still."

"Why—did you suspect at all?"

"Nothing that I don't suspect now. Poor fellow!"

"*Poor!*" Dearest, that's carrying soft-heartedness too far. Think—if he'd married some girl."

"I have often thought of it."

"What must Mrs. Milton and Fanny be feeling?" went on Mrs. Loveland. "Friends on the ship—and now he knocks down the husband and father in the street, because——"

"Ah, yes, because of what?" echoed Lesley.

"Mr. Milton says——"

"I read what he said. But his photograph is in the paper."

"What has that got to do with it?"

"Nothing, unless one's interested in physiognomy."

"I don't know anything about physiognomy," said Mrs. Loveland.

"Neither do I," said Lesley, "except what I was born knowing."

"Well, dear, I don't think I'd talk to any of our friends about having met this dreadful impostor," Aunt Barbara suggested, gently. "People might fancy, if you did, that there'd been—oh, some little shipboard flirtation, perhaps, nothing serious, of course, but——"

"So they might," admitted the girl. "I didn't think at the time, myself, that it was anything serious."

"I should hope not!" breathed Aunt Barbara. "A valet!"

"Marquis or Valet?" murmured Lesley, with a quaint little smile. "It sounds like the title of an old-fashioned story."

"For goodness' sake don't use it," begged her aunt. "The material isn't worthy of you."

"Oh, my stories are always new-fashioned," said Lesley. "You know, the critics reproach me for running ahead of the times in my ideas."

"You certainly are rather unexpected," replied Mrs. Loveland. "Sometimes I almost wish you were a tiny—just a tiny bit more conventional."

"You wished it when I said 'poor fellow.'"

"Oh, but you didn't really mean that."

"I did," persisted Lesley. "I should be disappointed in myself if I thought I could fail to recognise a valet when I saw one. And I hate being disappointed—in anyone."

"It *must* be disappointing to an author—one who has to be a student of character," assented Aunt Barbara, soothingly.

"Even when she's forgotten all about that part of herself for awhile, owing to—interruptions."

The dovelike little lady looked hurt. "Oh, my dear, I do beg your pardon!" she cried. "Of course I know, at this time of day—I'm only in the library on sufferance."

"I didn't mean you, Auntie," said Lesley, kissing her.

"Not me? Who, then——"

"But I really ought to write."

"I do hope I haven't taken your inspiration away, dearest."

"No. You've given me one."

"I'm so glad. Well, I'll run away now. I've lots of things to see to. Forget all about the Marquis of Loveland—I mean the valet. Put him out of your mind."

"Don't worry, Auntie. It's quite easy to put a valet out of a tidy, well-regulated little mind like mine."

"Think of Dick," said Mrs. Loveland. "He's going to be a splendid fellow."

"Dick's a paper doll," said Lesley.

Perhaps it was because she was not in a mood to play dolls that, when Aunt Barbara was gone, Lesley did not go back to her sofa and her story writing. She picked up the paper which Mrs. Loveland had left lying on the table, but she did not read. She merely looked at Mr. Milton's photograph. Then she went to the desk where she kept papers, and took a cheque-book from a drawer.

"No, that won't do," she said to herself, after thinking for a minute. She put the cheque-book back in its place, and opened another drawer, not locked, for neither drawers nor cupboards nor hearts were ever locked in this old-fashioned Kentucky house.

The second drawer was full of greenbacks. Perhaps it was a kind of savings bank for the young author; but, poor or rich, authors are proverbially easy about parting with their earnings, and Southern-born Lesley was no exception to the rule.

She counted out a number of bills—(more than half)—folded them up in a blank sheet of paper, torn off the writing pad, that there might be no address upon it, and pressed the flattened parcel into a large, stout envelope. This she sealed with blue sealing wax, and after a moment or two of puzzled reflection, began to print, in big black letters:

"The Marquis of Loveland
Waldorf-Astoria Hotel
New York
To be sent immediately to present address."

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

THE MARQUIS OF TWELFTH STREET

It was Isidora who found out first what was in her father's mind, because she saw the advertisement which Alexander the Great had written for the papers. It lay on the parlour table, in clear black and white for any eye to read, when Isidora came to clear away the litter of odds and ends that Emmie the "hired girl" might lay the dinner things.

"Oh, Pa!" she gasped. "Is *that* what you're going to do?"

"Of course," said Alexander the Great, staring at her over his spectacles, as he wiped his pen and pushed his chair from the table. "Tell that gel to hurry up. Don't she know by dis dat I've got just twenty minutes for dinner? I'll have to go before dessert, if she don't get busy."

"You want to change the subject, Pa," said Isidora.

"No, I don't. Why for? 'Tain't your business."

"'Twas me had the idea. He won't stand bein' advertised."

"Pooh!" said Alexander.

"I tell you he won't. He'll quit. He's afraid the police are onto him, anyhow."

"Milton ain't lodged no complaint. Nobody has, or I'd have kicked de feller out, first thing, when you tol' me who he was. Nobody ain't goin' to touch him."

"And nobody ain't goin' to keep him, when he sees *that*," added Isidora, pointing to the paragraph written in Alexander the Great's clearest handwriting.

"He needn't see it, unless you blab, silly gel," said her father. "What for should he read newspaper advertisements? I guess he got somet'in' else to do."

"Somebody'll tell him."

"People come here to eat, not talk. Anyhow, dis goes."

And it went.

It went to several papers; and though Alexander the Great paid only for the insertion of small paragraphs in the columns of the journals, he chuckled to himself in anticipation of receiving far more valuable advertisements, gratis; nor was he wrong. In matters of business within the scope of his capabilities Alexander was seldom wrong. That was why he was great. True it might be that "Lord Loveland of the Waldorf-Astoria" (as Tony Kidd had dubbed him) was a back number, and had been superseded in public esteem by at least two promising murderers, and one lively divorcée; nevertheless, even small crimes were thankfully received by newspaper men and women, as Alexander had reason to know. Did he not owe part of his present success to a dearth of sea-serpents, just about the time when Bill Willing had begun to decorate the walls of the new red restaurant in Twelfth Street? Alexander had spent a little money then in sprinkling a few paragraphs over dull columns that set forth the advantages of pale pills, or bath chairs. Reporters on the prowl had happened to read, happened to laugh, and eventually happened to pass through Twelfth Street.

So now Alexander hoped again for something to happen, and did not hope in vain. Journalists were not needing sea-serpents at this season, which was rosy with debutantes, pearly with brides, and sparkling with balls and dinner parties, as well as lurid with exciting murders. But Tony Kidd's enterprising eye lit on Alexander's inspiration, while it was still as fresh as tomorrow's bread, in the issue of "New York Light" which was in the making.

He considered Loveland still his own—though Tony had passed on to better "scoops" since the night when he had changed his first sketchy impressions of the "Difficult Young Man to Approach" into a "story" far more entertaining. He was greatly amused at the latest development of "l'affaire Loveland," and thought that even a preoccupied public would be amused, too, especially as Alexander's own paragraph was quaintly quotable.

"Lost at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, the Marquis of Loveland. Found, Ditto, at Alexander the Great's in Twelfth Street. If you want to be served by a Lord, dine at Alexander's for 25C, Marquis included. You eat your dinner; Waiter Loveland does the rest."

Tony was very busy just then, having an important errand out of town by the first train in the morning, but he secretly commissioned an understudy to be at Alexander's when the red restaurant should open its doors; to order breakfast, and, while seeming to eat, to sketch the new English waiter. The understudy was not to question Loveland himself, but, if possible, Alexander, and was not to let the waiter see that he was under fire of attention. Notes of Loveland's appearance, as well as a drawing, must be made for Mr. Kidd's benefit, because the sharp young journalist was not going to let himself be "spoofed." It was quite on the cards that some other enterprising person might have taken a fancy to call himself a Marquis, in order to attract customers to Alexander's; and if so, Tony's little story would have to differ slightly from the original design.

When he came back from the country, late in the afternoon, however, Mr. Kidd at once recognised the cleverly executed sketch. There was no longer any doubt in his mind that the young man who had slammed the door in his face at the Waldorf-Astoria was now "pie slinger" in a cheap downtown restaurant.

Tony questioned his understudy as to what he had found out, and learned that Alexander himself had been privately interviewed. The great man had discouraged the artist-reporter from talking with the "Marquis," who, it seemed, was ignorant that he had begun to figure again in the newspapers. The fellow had been starving, said Alexander, and permitted the use of his name to a limited extent, but "might kick" if he heard of the advertisements. Alexander wished him to "kind of get used to things" before people noticed him much, for he was a queer fish, close-mouthed, inclined to hold onto the ragged edges of dignity in spite of his fall. The idea was to let it leak out very gradually that "Lord Loveland" was being "worked to draw a crowd"; and thus admonished, Tony Kidd's understudy had let the new waiter alone.

Tony Kidd himself, however, only laughed, because he understood Alexander's little ways, and guessed how he expected to get his money's worth out of the newspapers. The journalist wrote his story, which he fancied exceedingly, and his editor was pleased with it, too, although it was sure to give Alexander a tremendous free boom. Next morning there was half a column on a good page of "Light" (including space for the understudy's line portrait of a tall young man in evening dress, with a coffee pot in one hand and a milk-jug in the other); and even the printers grinned at the heading: "The Marquis of Twelfth Street: Newly Acquired Title."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THROUGH THE TELEPHONE

A persistent ringing of the telephone in Fanny Milton's bedroom waked her out of a delightful dream.

She was on shipboard again. It was moonlight, and Lord Loveland was telling her that he really cared a great deal more for her than for Lesley Dearmer. She confessed that she liked him, too; and he was just asking her to come and reign over Loveland Castle as well as his heart, when the

distant, though disturbing, notes of an amateur concert in the music room of the *Mauretania* turned definitely into the shrill bur—r of that wretched telephone. The dream broke like a rainbow bubble, and Fanny sat up in bed, disappointed with life.

It was past ten o'clock, but she had been at a ball the night before, and had not meant to wake till eleven. After the dream realities seemed flat and unprofitable for a minute, and she was angry with the telephone, so angry that she was tempted to spite it by turning over and trying to sleep again. But the hateful thing went on bumbling like a distracted bee; and after all, the simplest way to get rid of the pest was to see what it wanted.

Fanny got up, looking like a cross, pretty child of twelve, with her hanging hair, and the delicate, fluffy nightgown in which she was not cold, because the temperature of her room would have been considered warm for summer.

She seated herself by the telephone and snatched up the receiver as if she were going to shake it. But she soon settled down to an absorbing interest in the give and take of conversation with the instrument.

"Hello!" she said. "Who are you? Oh, Elinor Coolidge—what?—I was in bed. You waked me up. Never mind. It doesn't matter.... Yes, it was a nice enough ball. Were you.... Oh, at Mrs. VanderPot's. How swagger! No, we weren't invited. I didn't care. But Mamma was mad. I don't know what's the matter with Mamma since we got back. She's got a 'chip on her shoulder,' for nearly everyone.... No. Of course we haven't seen the paper. I just told you, you waked me up.... What?... Lord Love—oh, don't call him *that!* It sounds so cruel. I shall never forget his face at the Wal—Why, Elinor Coolidge, you don't mean it! Waiting in a cheap restaurant.... I don't believe it's true.... In the paper? Well, there's nothing in *that*.... I know a newspaper man myself.... What? Oh, his name's Tony Kidd. He's great fun. He says he lies all night thinking of lies for all day. Says a pressman must lie all in all, or not at all. If it's his paper.... Yes: 'Light.' Oh, then it's sure to be a joke.... No, I would not like to go and find out for myself. It was bad enough at the Waldorf that night. It just about gave me nervous prostration, and I didn't see how you could take it so coolly as you did, or Mamma either.... No. She likes you. She hasn't a good word for him, now. Says she suspected from the first, and was always trying to pump him and find out things.... Oh, that horrid affair about him and Papa? I don't think she cares much. She says Papa oughtn't to have spoken to him, and then it wouldn't have happened.... Yes, Papa went off to Old Point with that sneery Mr. Mason Mamma detests so.... It was the very next day, I believe.... Who says Papa's back in New York?... Well, if he is, he must be going to surprise Mamma and me. We haven't seen him yet.

"Oh, Elinor, I think it would be *horrid* to make up a party and go to that restaurant.... Yes, I like slumming and seeing Bohemian places pretty well, at least I think I do.... I haven't done much yet. Mamma has, but she hardly ever took me out with her anywhere, you know, till we went to Europe.... Yes, in Paris.... But here it's different.... Well, I don't believe we'd find him there if we went, but all the same, I don't want to.... Why, I can't help it if you ask Mamma to chaperon a party.... I won't go. Nothing will make me.... I can't answer for her.... I don't know whether she's engaged this evening or not. She hasn't been going out so very much since we came home.... Oh, yes. She's sure not to have left the house yet. She's never out till eleven.... Who? The Comte de Rocheverte?... I met him at the ball last night.... What?... He was at Mrs. VanderPot's dinner first?... Took you in?... Yes, he did speak to me of you, when I danced with him.... Oh, it was only one waltz, but I tore my frock, so we sat out the last part. I can't dance with Frenchmen: they hop so—and twirl you about.... It was only that he asked me if I knew you.... Of course he said he thought you beautiful. Everyone thinks so. He told me he met you at Major Cadwallader Hunter's lunch at Sherry's, two days after we got home.... No, the Major didn't ask us. Mamma says he's turned the cold shoulder to her lately. I don't know why.... Yes, the Count *is* rather good-looking. As handsome as ... oh, nothing to compare! You *know* he isn't.... Pooh, I don't think so much of French titles, as all that.... I suppose people will be nice to him.... Yes, quite good enough for a flirtation, but.... You're welcome to your old Comte.... It's no inducement to *me*, if he joins the party. It may be to Mamma.... You can ask her.... Well, I think it would be jolly bad form of you all to go to such a place and stare at him, if it could be true that he ... yes, perhaps 'jolly bad form' was an expression of his. I don't care if it was.... Oh, I suppose all the horrid things about him must be true, because the news wouldn't have come the way it did, if they weren't. But I *did* like him, and I won't say I didn't now, just because he's down in the world.... Lucky not to go to prison? Why, he didn't defraud anybody, exactly. He came over here to ... well, perhaps he did. But he didn't do it, anyhow.... I don't believe he stayed in New York after what happened. Everyone who knew anything about it, said he probably slipped out of town that same night, for fear of trouble.... Why, abroad somewhere, I should think.... I would, if I had been in his place.... Not money enough to go away anywhere? Oh, he must have had some.... How too awful if it should be true!... No, I wouldn't see him again for anything—not if you'd give me your diamond dog-collar to do it.... I think if you and Mamma and your Comte de Rocheverte go you'll be just like ancient Romans watching the martyrs eaten up by lions.... Not much like a Christian martyr? Well, no, perhaps not. Like going to see gladiators fight and kill each other, then.... Elinor Coolidge, hearing you talk that way makes me just see how you'd look dressed like a Roman lady, sitting on a marble seat beside Nero or some other wicked old horror, and putting your thumb down when it meant a man's death. Yes, you would.... I believe you were a Roman woman in another state of existence.... I won't talk about it any more.... You can ring up Mamma, if you like.... Goodbye!"

Down went the receiver, and back scrambled little Fanny Milton into her lavender-scented bed,

shivering, not with cold, but with emotion. Her telephone was silent at last, but she could not find her way into the dream again. The door of that dream was shut forever; and Fanny was not jealous even of Lesley Dearmer now.

"I wonder if she knows—if he ever wrote to her?—they were such friends," the girl said to herself, with the cover pulled up to her small chin, and the big eyes that had overflowed for Loveland, staring through the pink twilight of her curtained room. What if it's true about that restaurant—if he were starving?

After all, it was no use to try and sleep again. Fanny rang for the prim maid her mother had imported for her from England, and demanded the tea and toast which that maid said all well-regulated English ladies took on waking. Then, as if on a second thought, she added: "Oh, you may bring me the morning paper. It must be "New York Light." If it isn't in the house, please tell them to send out for it."

But it was in the house. Mrs. Milton had been absorbing "Light" with her tea and toast; and when her telephone bell rang for the unfolding of Miss Coolidge's amusing plan, she said she would have a great deal of pleasure in chaperoning a "slumming party" to Alexander the Great's. She had an engagement for the evening, but she would break it in order to go. She quite understood that Elinor did not care to mention the expedition to Mr. Coolidge. Men had such funny ideas about things, and he mightn't approve, but it would be all right if he didn't know, and a great lark. Elinor was to ask the Comte de Rocheverte, of course, and tell him that Mrs. Milton had consented to be the chaperon.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

ALEXANDER'S BUSY DAY

Elinor Coolidge's first thought after reading Tony Kidd's very entertaining "story" in "New York Light," went no further than the fun of paying a visit to Alexander the Great's, and being waited upon by the man whose supercilious airs on the *Mauretania* had made her feel "ready to burst with spontaneous combustion." She had hurried to telephone Fanny Milton, because a chaperon was necessary, and Fanny's mother was one of the few women she knew who would not care whether Mr. Coolidge's consent had been asked or not. Then she had thought that it would be nice to go with some particularly good-looking and distinguished young man, whose presence with her would prick the unfortunate Englishman to jealousy, and give him the sensations of an outcast dog, who sees another animal pampered with choice morsels, and collared with gold.

When Mrs. Milton consented to be the chaperon, it no longer mattered to Elinor that Fanny refused to join the party. Fanny was a silly, sentimental child, anyway, thought Miss Coolidge, who had asked the girl only for the sake of obtaining the mother. But, having got so far, Elinor's plan began to grow and take ambitious form. It occurred to her that it would be dramatic to collect the whole circle of girls (excepting little spoil-sport Fanny) to whom Lord Loveland had been attentive on board the *Mauretania*. Each girl must, if possible, bring a man, Elinor naturally picking out the best for herself; and the most desirable seemed to be Comte de Rocheverte, a new arrival in America, whom she had met for the first time a night or two after returning to New York.

Of course he wasn't nearly as splendid a person as a real Marquis of Loveland would have been, but (though conservative girls who preferred home products, and jealous girls whom titled foreigners didn't cultivate, called French counts "thick as blackberries and nearly as common") Elinor had a weakness for old aristocracies. Besides, de Rocheverte seemed to her of that dashing type which prides itself on doing anything to please a woman. If she asked him to play a certain part in her little comedy, she thought that he would carry it off gaily, whereas the rôle might not be to the taste of her American friends.

She sent a note by messenger to a club of which the Comte had been made an honorary member, to make certain of securing him. Then, his answer having assured her that Raoul de Rocheverte was "entirely and devotedly at her service when, where, and how she liked," she telephoned to the four girls she wanted for the adventure. Of these, one could not come; another could, but wouldn't, for the same reason as Fanny's (this was Madge Beverly); and the remaining two thought it would be "more fun than a wedding." Each would bring a man (Mrs. Milton also could be trusted to find one), and the party would therefore consist of eight.

Never since Bill Willing had first made the fame of Alexander the Great had there been such a busy day in the red restaurant as the day when Tony's story and sketch of "The Marquis of Twelfth Street" appeared in "New York Light."

Breakfast was almost normal; but an unusual number of people strolled in between nine and eleven—"pie and milk" hours—and nearly all had newspapers in their hands. As they sat at the red-legged tables, sipping a two-cent glass of milk, they glanced at something in the paper, and stared at the tall young man in evening clothes who moved about solemnly with a tray of plates or cups and saucers.

By noon there was a rush of customers; the crowd increased rather than diminished up to half-

past one, and throughout the afternoon the place was crammed.

Luckily, foreseeing that the new waiter would be awkward, more valuable for ornament than for use, Alexander had accepted the services of a young Pole in Dutchy's place. There was also Blinkey; but Blinkey was deep in the agony of hopeless love for the Boss's beautiful daughter, and was not to be counted on with any confidence, owing to his habit of gazing at Isidora when she was in sight, and pouring hot liquids down clients' necks if she suddenly disappeared.

There was more work than Alexander, Loveland, and the two others could do; therefore soon after twelve the aid of "Miss Izzie" had to be called in. The coloured cook and the cook's assistant worked until their brains were as nearly addled as any egg ever employed in their most economical moments; and to several members of the staff the reason for the rush remained a mystery. Alexander knew and smiled in his sleeve. Isidora knew, and cast reproachful, "I told you so!" glances at her father, as she heard the rustle of opening newspapers. But the Pole did not understand the curious questions people whispered to him; Blinkey was stupid as well as sullen; while as for Loveland himself, none dared to catechise him, so set were his lips, so threatening his brows.

Of course he suspected that it was he who brought the crowd, and raged in the shame of his burning martyrdom. Alexander had said that he was to be "used for all he was worth" and he was sure that, already, he was in some way being used. But he did not know how, or guess the worst.

At first, when the place began to fill, and eyes regarded him with interest, there was a hot instant when he asked himself if a new card had been hung in the window, offering a British Lord as an attraction—a kind of side dish, with sauce piquante. But he had slept at the Bat Hotel the night before, and in coming "on duty" had seen the cards as usual. There had been no sensational addition to the number, and no opportunity for anybody to have made one since, unseen by him. Bill had received no orders for any secret new design, Loveland was sure; for Bill was loyal and would certainly have warned him. Val supposed, therefore, that Alexander must have told people that the Marquis of Loveland would act as a waiter in the restaurant; that such people had passed the news to others, and so on, working upon the snowball system; this great increase of visitors being the result.

Loveland hated his notoriety with hatred inexpressible, though it was, in a way, a ghastly sort of tribute to the importance of the British aristocracy. It was not, however, the sort of tribute his vanity craved, and his one consolation was that the crowd Alexander had drawn to gaze at the tame Marquis was a common crowd. Indeed, he thought there was no danger that the red restaurant would be invaded by the upper classes. He would not see or be seen by the sort of people he would have met if he had not stumbled into this obscure pitfall of misfortune. Soon, too, he should have earned enough money to climb out of it, and leave the country.

With the feigned indifference of a caged white bear for a bank holiday crush, the new waiter performed his duties during the day. If the restaurant were crammed throughout the afternoon, by six o'clock there was a mob. By seven, however, the place began to clear and Alexander rejoiced, because there was much work for his staff to do before eight. Dishes must be washed and special food cooked, and a dozen tables prepared for two "crowds" who had engaged accommodation in advance.

One was a wedding party of Italians, numbering fifteen. The other was something more exciting: a party of "swells" who had telephoned for dinner at eight.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

FIRE!

Laughing and talking they all tramped into the restaurant. Elinor Coolidge and Comte de Rocheverte; Eva Tanner and Kate Wood, with the handsome Hungarian twins, who were rather sought after in New York just then; Baron Ludovic Zsencha and his brother Paul; last Mrs. Milton and Tony Kidd.

Tony had intended to drop in at Alexander's in any case, to have a look at the Marquis of Twelfth Street, who had been "discovered" by that morning's "Light"; but he would have come on directly after returning from a second out of town expedition if a telegram had not been forwarded to the country, asking him to be Mrs. Milton's escort.

This invitation Tony accepted with pleasure, not only because it tickled his sense of humour to go to Alexander's as a member of a "slumming party," but because he hoped to see Fanny Milton, whom he thought the sweetest girl in New York. Last year Mrs. Milton would hardly have considered him "good enough" socially to select as companion, but there were people who looked at her a little askance now, and she could not pick and choose as she had done. Tony knew very well to what he owed his promotion, but that did not affect him in the least if it gave him a chance of seeing Fanny.

He was disappointed to find that she was not going, and his spirits were dashed by the news that she disapproved of the "Loveland sensation," for which he knew himself to be largely responsible.

Nevertheless, in manner he was as gay as the others, when the party of eight made its merry raid upon Alexander's.

The Italian marriage feast was already in full swing; but neither the bridal party nor any of the thirty or forty other occupants of the restaurant were too deeply absorbed in their own affairs to notice the arrival of the "swells."

Not a soul in the room but instantly recognised the fact that they *were* "swells," for though the ladies had put on their plainest gowns for the expedition, and the men had been forbidden to appear in evening dress, there was a marked difference between Alexander's eight latest guests and all the others already assembled.

"Hullo! I suppose we ought to feel honoured!" muttered Mr. Leo Cohen, who had just arrived from the West, and was paying a surprise visit to the establishment of his future father-in-law. He had demanded fried oysters and coffee, and had greatly enjoyed giving the order to the handsome new member of Alexander's staff.

"Get a move on, *if* you please," he finished, pointing his black moustache, and prodding his white teeth with a gold toothpick, as he stared at the man made notorious by today's newspapers. Pressing his lips tightly together Loveland turned away to pass the order to Black Dick, the cook.

It was at this moment that Mrs. Milton's party entered the restaurant, and Mr. Cohen murmured his comment to Isidora who, at her father's urgent suggestion, was hovering about that young gentleman's table, looking her prettiest.

Tony Kidd, at Mrs. Milton's request, had telephoned for a table for eight, to be withdrawn as far as possible from the big front window, that dinner and diners need not be criticised by the man in the street. Alexander had, therefore, caused Blinkey to drag the largest table in the room close to the curtained door at the back. At this table—by the time Loveland had given Cohen's order to Black Dick, and returned across the corridor which divided the restaurant from the kitchen—the four pretty women and their escorts had taken their seats.

The door behind the curtain was never shut in business hours; and as Loveland pushed back the red drapery, carrying a tray loaded with ice cream for the Italians, he looked straight into the eyes of Elinor Coolidge, Mrs. Milton, and the newspaper man, Tony Kidd.

They and their companions had already been searching the room for him, but their presence took him completely by surprise.

Not since early morning had he found a moment's rest. He had had no appetite, and would have had little time to eat even if he had been hungry. The day's work had irritated and unnerved him up to the last notch of his endurance. No battle of his brief but lively South African experience had cost him physically or mentally as much as these thirteen hours of waiting on Alexander's customers, and the sudden sight of those familiar faces, smiling coolly on his shame, came upon him like a volley of bullets from a quick-firing gun.

Involuntarily he took a step back, knocked the edge of the tray against the door-post, and dropped it with a crash of breaking crockery. Plates smashed, spoons flew, and ice-cream gushed among the ruins. Blinkey and the Polish waiter sprang to their colleague's assistance, not displeased, however, that he should be disgraced. Alexander scolded, the Italian bride screamed, and had to be reassured by the bridegroom. Leo Cohen laughed disagreeably; Isidora jumped; and Mrs. Milton's party looked at each other from under lifted eyebrows.



"Involuntary he took a step back, ... and dropped the tray with a crash of breaking crockery"

In the confusion of the breakage Loveland found himself again. Pride came to his rescue—not mere hurt vanity, but a truer pride than had ever made his heart beat high.

As he bent down to pick up the broken plates, he told himself that these people, who had come to plunge him still deeper in humiliating depths, were not worth a pang, and should not see that they had power to inflict it. They had caught him unawares, but he knew the worst now, and would bear it without letting those laughing, curious eyes see how their glances made him suffer.

For one short instant, he detested Mrs. Milton so intensely that he half regretted his vow to spare her name at all hazards; but by the time he had picked up the last piece of broken crockery he knew that, if everything were to come over again, he would do as he had done.

"I take dat out of your wages," said Alexander, loudly enough to be heard by those who sat round the table near to the curtained door.

"Of course," replied Loveland, his voice steady.

"I shouldn't have thought the British aristocracy would have such clumsy ways," Leo Cohen remarked audibly to Isidora. Then, calling jocularly across the room, "Say Alexander, got any mock turtle soup tonight?"

"No," growled Alexander.

"Thought you might be makin' a speciality of it this week," went on Cohen.

"Why?"

"Oh, cute idea for an advertisement: 'Mock Turtle served by Mock Marquis.'"

A titter went round the room among those who had enough English to understand the joke, and there was even a faint, suppressed sound of laughter at Mrs. Milton's table.

Loveland turned white. He had an impulse to hurl the broken dishes, now collected on the tray, straight at Cohen's oiled black head; and a week ago he would have done so without stopping to reflect. But he had lived longer in six days since landing in New York than in as many years before; and he was learning a lesson which no one had even tried to teach him in the past; mastery of himself.

He knew that if he took violent revenge upon the insolent young Jew, his late shipmates and their friends would delight in the exhibition. They would think that they were getting their money's worth out of the show, and Loveland determined not to play mountebank for their entertainment.

Pale, but perfectly composed in appearance, he did not even look towards Cohen, and seemed to take no more notice of the young man's impertinence than of the barking of some mongrel dog, too feeble to be kicked.

Ardently Loveland longed to get out of the room and to stay out, but though he could have escaped by carrying the broken dishes into the kitchen, he would not deign to turn his back on the enemy. He gave the tray to Blinkey and obeyed a gesture of Alexander's which sent him to take a new order from the Italians.

"I don't believe he'll come to wait on us," whispered Mrs. Milton to Tony Kidd. "If he doesn't, it will have been hardly worth the fag of coming all this way downtown. His handing us our things would have been the best fun of all."

"I think you'll get your fun," mumbled Tony. But he was not enjoying himself.

"Of course the man's a fraud, and deserves all he's got," the journalist thought. "But I'm hanged if I like seeing him take his medicine. He's a good plucked one, anyhow."

Never glancing at the eight faces, which watched his every movement with sixteen brilliant eyes, Loveland passed their table and went to tell the cook that the Italian party would have a rum omelet in place of the lost ice-cream. Cohen's fried oysters were ready, the Pole having just served them, and now the second course of the dinner—begun already with Blue Points—was waiting for the "swells." It was soup, and Loveland had either to carry it in, and serve it himself, or else to show that the torture of the lash was beyond his endurance.

"They shall see that I'm not ashamed for myself or afraid of them," he resolved, returning to the restaurant with a steaming tureen and eight hot plates on a tray. Without a change of expression he laid those eight plates, one by one, in their places on the table; and then, with a hand which he forced to be steady, he ladled out the soup. The ladies drew back, as if uneasy lest he might seek some small revenge; but he was careful not to spill a drop.

"*Les biscuits, s'il vous plait,*" said Comte de Rocheverte, looking Loveland straight and superciliously in the eyes; but the English waiter did not flinch from the stare of the French nobleman. He walked quietly to the counter, took some biscuits (which Isidora called "crackers")

from a glass jar, put them on a platter, and handed them to each member of Mrs. Milton's party.

"He understands French," murmured de Rocheverte to Miss Coolidge. "He must have had some education."

Loveland heard, and swallowed a lump in his throat. He knew that the young man and the girl were looking at him, talking of him; and that if he were visibly distressed by the knowledge they would be the more amused. But he snatched a moment's respite in waiting upon a seedy, bearded stranger, who had just come in and taken an isolated table—a stranger who looked like a foreigner, a person who would not be interested in a marquis born of any nation. In a moment, however, came a summons from Alexander. "You attend to the ladies and gents," was the Boss's order; "Blinkey can see to that feller. What does he want?"

"A ham-sandwich and black coffee," said Loveland.

"Oh, Pa, don't send Mr. Gordon to wait on the swells again," softly pleaded Isidora, flitting up uneasily. "They're trying to take a rise out of him. It's crool. I—"

"Thank you, but I don't mind, Miss Alexander," said Loveland, with a grateful look, which went so straight to Isidora's heart that tears started to her eyes.

Val took away the eight soup plates, and would not see the amused glances of the good-looking Hungarians, or Elinor Coolidge's French Count. Rocheverte was not cruel at heart, but he did not like Englishmen at best, and Elinor Coolidge, having told him the story of Lord Loveland, as she knew it, had said: "We girls want to punish him not only for the way he would have deceived us all if he could, but for his perfectly horrid, supercilious airs when we used to know him on board ship; so please help us by sneering and staring as much as you can without making a scene."

She had looked so handsome when she made this request, that de Rocheverte had told her he would grant it with pleasure, and he was doing his best to keep his word.

They had got as far in the dinner as chicken fried with cream gravy, for which Black Dick was renowned, when the restaurant door opened, and Mr. Milton walked in, accompanied by another man.

Mrs. Milton flushed with vexation, for she was sure that he had come back to town thus unexpectedly with the idea of surprising her; that he must have gone home and questioned Fanny as to her mother's whereabouts, and then have followed to Alexander's solely for the satisfaction of spoiling her pleasure—unless a little for the sake of seeing his late antagonist figuring as a waiter.

Milton sauntered over to the table and spoke to everyone civilly, darting only one covert, ugly glance at his wife, when her fascinated gaze rested upon the fading bruise which discoloured his square jaw.

"Read 'Light' this morning, Tony, and the afternoon papers copying it," he said. "Thought I'd drop in at the cockfight and see the fun. Great stunt, isn't it?" He eyed Loveland up and down, as if the Englishman were a freak at a museum. "Of course the story was yours?"

For the first time Val's eyes and Tony's met, only for an instant, but there was something like reproach in Loveland's. A trapped hare might have thrown a look like that at the keeper who trapped him.

"I suppose he thinks it was revenge for the slammed door," the young newspaperman said to himself. "But it wasn't. I'm not that kind of chap. I'd like him to know I'm not. But I expect it'll have to go at that."

"Well, ta ta!" said Milton, "and I'll order something for the good of the house, now we're here. We're not obliged to eat it, thank Heaven."

He turned away, and was drawing out a chair for himself near one upon which the seedy, bearded stranger had placed a small leather handbag, when suddenly the whole restaurant seemed alive with dry, crackling explosions, and in the same instant the electric lamps went out. The room, a moment ago brilliantly lighted, was black as a vault, save for a glimmer from the street that shone through the window. Then, as everyone jumped up, overturning chairs or breaking glasses in their hurry and the shrieks of the Italian women mingled with the strange crackling sounds, there came from somewhere at the back a loud detonation, followed by a hoarse roaring like a blast furnace. Men cried out in amazed alarm, and the dark room lit up ominously with a crimson glare that turned the curtain through which it leaked the colour of blood.

In rushed Black Dick and his assistant, with Blinkey, who had been busy in the kitchen, and all three shouted wildly: "Fire! Fire!"

The restaurant was in a state of chaos. A long jet of flame, sweeping out from the kitchen and across the narrow passage, caught the curtain in the door-way, up which little serpents of fire began to crawl. Every woman was screaming now, in a panic of fear whipped to horror by the red darkness, and the crackling explosions which snapped and spluttered on every side. The excitable Italians chattered and struggled with one another in the dark, the new Polish waiter ran here and there like a frightened chicken that sees the axe; the two negroes were almost in convulsions, and Tony Kidd called vainly on the Hungarian brothers and de Rocheverte for help in bringing

order out of confusion.

The thought that flashed through the minds of all was an anarchist plot—a dynamite bomb. For one terrible second everybody remembered the bearded stranger with the little bag, and debited him with the deadly mischief—everyone, perhaps, except Loveland and Tony Kidd.

Into their heads the same thought sprang at the same moment, for each, it happened, had in his memory some such scene as this.

At the time of the first explosion Loveland had been quietly setting a plate of fried chicken before Tony, and as the journalist leaped from his seat, the two young men were close together.

"Short circuiting—escape from a fused gas pipe," Loveland yelled through the noise.

"Yes, that's it," the reporter shouted back mechanically, as if to a friend.

Then, for a few seconds, Tony was overwhelmed by a wild rush of frightened women. In the red light that streamed through the burning curtain he saw a crowd fighting to reach the window and the closed front door of the restaurant.

Upon his incredulous eyes flashed a horrid tableau of de Rocheverte throwing off Elinor Coolidge, who clung to him, crying, "Save me—save me!" As the Frenchman blindly flung her away and dashed towards the door, the girl would have fallen on her knees, to be trampled under foot by the two Hungarians, had not Loveland pushed the men violently aside, and caught Elinor in his arms.

"Keep her—keep all the ladies in this corner out of the crush," he cried to Tony. "I'm going to turn off the gas at the main." Then he gave Elinor, half fainting, to Tony Kidd, who firmly called Mrs. Milton, Miss Turner, and Miss Wood by name. The sound of the two calm voices in the midst of shouts, smashing glass, falling chairs, and foreign exclamations, rallied the women's courage. As Tony held Elinor the three others passed near him, deserted by the foreigners of their party; and in the bloodshot haze all saw Loveland's tall figure apparently plunge into the flame. He made a dash through the door-way, his arms thrown across his eyes, to shield them from the fire; and ten seconds later the loud roaring ceased as suddenly as it had begun. The cracklings had ceased, too, for the short circuiting was over, and the stream of gas burnt itself out an instant after Loveland seized the handle of the main. But the curtain still blazed; the stairway in the passage, the door frames in the kitchen and restaurant were on fire, and the panic raged as wildly as ever among the fallen chairs and tables.

The doorhandle had been broken by Leo Cohen as he fiercely disputed with Milton the right to get out first, and none could now escape that way, although men battered the panels, and strove to break them in. Someone had smashed a hole in the thick plate glass window, big enough to create a dangerous draught, but not large enough to give a means of retreat for any of the men and women who, with cut and bleeding hands, struggled to squeeze through the jagged opening.

One hand badly burnt, face and hair singed, Loveland was back in a minute from his errand at the gas main. He had snatched up a huge kettle of water from the stove, and dashed it onto the stairs, quenching the small flames which had begun to curl and writhe. Then, tearing down the curtain, he trampled out the fire, and as the flames died into shooting sparks and feebly puffing smoke, he urged Tony to bring the ladies that way. "Upstairs—we'll get them upstairs, out of the crowd," he shouted; but instantly the whole throng would have turned to stream in that direction, had not Tony Kidd kept the way clear by making an obstacle of his own broad shoulders.

He got a fierce blow or two, but held the pass until the four ladies of his party, and Isidora, had reached shelter with Loveland.

The women safe, Tony tore off his coat and began beating down the fiery snakes which crawled up the door frame towards the ceiling. Loveland, meanwhile, having refuged the four ladies with Isidora, hurried back to stand by Tony Kidd. Together they collected all the Italian women, whom they lifted bodily over a barricade of tables, and grouped in a corner beyond the reach of fire or crowd.

It was left for Blinkey to give the alarm. Being the thinnest and smallest, he contrived to squeeze his lean body through the broken window, and shout for the police. Three minutes later two big men in blue sent the door crashing off its hinges into the restaurant, and by the time the fire engines swept clanging and snorting into the street the flames were stifled, and Alexander had found a few candles to light up the smoky darkness.

The whole drama in one act had played itself out from beginning to end in less than ten minutes; but it had come close to tragedy, as none realised more fully than the two whom it had very strangely brought together: Lord Loveland and Tony Kidd.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

"YOU'RE A MAN"

No one was killed or seriously injured, fortunately for Alexander the Great's popularity. Many hands and faces were cut with window-glass; two or three women had bruises or sprained wrists, and the Italian bride and groom were objects for compassion.

Loveland and Tony Kidd had saved the situation. Nobody else seemed to have accomplished anything deserving praise; but, when calm followed storm, de Rocheverte, Milton, his friend Mason, and the two Hungarians vied with one another in volubly explaining each act and failure to act. They had wanted to make a way out for the ladies; that was why they had tried to get to the door, but they had been caught and overwhelmed in the crowd. They all talked fast and eagerly, almost convincingly; but the ladies, pale and shattered, listened without answering. And when they thanked Tony Kidd for "saving them from being burnt alive," they were careful neither to contradict nor assent when he assured them that it was "our brave pretender who did everything."

As for Loveland, he was no longer to be seen. While the police asked questions, the firemen examined dark corners, and the battered crowd trailed gloomily away, Tony looked in vain for his comrade in battle.

Milton, for appearance sake, was compelled to offer escort to his wife, who cried and laughed hysterically, when she did not show symptoms of fainting. The husband's presence relieved Tony from guard duty, and he alleged as an excuse for staying behind the necessity to make a "story" out of the business. His party left the restaurant in carriages and motors, sadder and perhaps wiser; but no one asked for Loveland. Even if they thought of him, the women who had come to see him play the rôle of waiter could hardly acclaim him in the part of hero; while as for the men, if they realised what he and Tony Kidd had done, it was not to their interest or credit to acknowledge it.

Loveland had not, however, mysteriously disappeared. He was only keeping himself in the background; and the one background available at Alexander's was the kitchen.

It was now a smoky and dismal kitchen, with a wild litter of pots and pans, a table overturned, broken dishes, eggs, oysters, and raw batter strewn the floor; nevertheless, it seemed a haven of refuge to Loveland, after what he had suffered.

His dash through the flames to find the gas main had been a deed more gallant perhaps than the impulsive rescue on the battlefield which won him his D. S. O. Tonight, he had deliberately counted the cost, whereas in South Africa he had acted first, and thought afterwards. He was not excited now; that was all over, and there was time to think; yet he was conscious that he had conducted himself not unworthily.

"Funny thing," he thought, as he looked at his burnt left hand, and his singed coat; "funny thing! I suppose I behaved fairly decently, because I had to do it, and there was no other way. But I've fancied myself a lot more, before this, for a grand slam at bridge, or a right and left shot at a couple of birds."

There was no need to prove his courage further by reappearing in the restaurant. If he went back, it would look as if he were bidding for compliments from his late tormentors, and Heaven knew that he wanted nothing of the sort. He wanted only to be let alone. So he lurked in the kitchen, and looked on while Black Dick and Dick's still blacker aide-de-camp calculated and repaired the damage to their supplies. He even condescended to set the fallen table on its legs again, and in return for this service Dick was binding up his injured hand when the sound of a voice behind his back made him turn quickly.

"See here," said Tony Kidd, "I've been looking for you, because I want to tell you something. Whatever else you may or may not be, you're a man, anyhow."

As he delivered himself of this speech, Tony's pleasant, clever face lost the quizzical expression it was wont to wear, and looked very attractive in its earnestness.

"Thank you," answered Loveland, rather stiffly. Then, melting as his blue eyes and Tony's brown ones held each other, he added, smiling: "So are you."

"If I've made things any worse for you, I'm sorry," went on Tony. "It's all been in the way of business, you know."

Milton's words to the young journalist had cleared the mystery of the crowd who had glanced up from their newspapers to stare at the English waiter, and gone back to their newspapers again; Tony's veiled allusion brought no surprise to Loveland, therefore, and he answered without heat. "It doesn't matter," he said, quietly, in a tired voice which made good-natured Tony wince.

"You're in pain, aren't you?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing to speak of," said Val. "Burnt my hand and wrist a little, that's all."

"It was a narrow shave," said Tony. "By Jove, a 'shave' literally, for you've pretty well made a clearance of hair on one side of your head."

"I must look like a convict," returned Loveland. And considering everything, it struck Tony Kidd as odd that the Englishman should make that particular remark about himself.

"You've been having a mighty hard time of it since—er—since I saw you last," the journalist

observed.

"It has been an experience," said Loveland.

"I'd like to show my appreciation of the way you've acted tonight," said Tony. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

The thought flashed through Loveland's mind that he might tell this newspaper man the whole story of his extraordinary adventures since coming to New York—the trouble with the bank; the mysterious silence which alone had answered his two cablegrams; the unaccountable attitude of the Waldorf management; and the rudeness of his shipboard acquaintances in the restaurant. Tony Kidd had certainly "written up," or caused to be written up, his quarrel with Milton, from Milton's point of view; and now he had evidently drawn public attention to Loveland's affairs again by some further article. But if the journalist had cherished a desire for revenge, apparently he felt it no longer. Now he was hinting that he wished to make atonement, and Val believed that he meant what he said. If he would advance money on the letter of credit—but no; after a moment's reflection, Loveland made up his mind not to ask. He had had so many snubs already, he would prefer not to risk another, he told himself. Besides, after all that had happened, he could not ask a favour of this man, no matter how pleasantly it had been offered.

"Thank you very much, but I think there's nothing you can do," Loveland answered.

Tony knew of one thing that he could do, and had already decided to do it: to turn the tide of public opinion as far as possible by a graphic description of the fire at Alexander's in tomorrow morning's "Light." But, after all, that would not accomplish much, if any, material good. A wave of sympathy would only send more curiosity-seekers to Alexander's, and Tony's keen eyes had seen, through Loveland's mask of indifference, how he writhed under his punishment.

"Say, you can't stay on here," the American explained impulsively. "It's a dog's life—and whatever you are, whatever you've been, you're too much of a gentleman by breeding and education to stand it. You'll have to quit; and perhaps I could think of some way out, if you——"

"I'll thank you not to try and take my waiter away from me, Mr. Kidd," broke in Alexander the Great, speaking so suddenly behind the two young men that both started "like guilty things upon a fearful summons."

"This isn't the right place for him, Alexander, and you know it," retorted Tony.

"It's the place he's engaged to stay in, until he leaves the country," Alexander persisted. "And I mean to hold him to his word, or know the reason why."

"So said another gentleman of your race once," remarked Tony Kidd. "He did business in Venice, but in the end a lady got the better of him."

"Ladies don't interfere in my concerns," grumbled Alexander, who had not a prophetic soul, and did not guess what the next few hours might have in store for him. "If Gordon leaves me without a week's notice I'll make him sorry for himself."

"He saved your place tonight, and Lord knows how many lives," said Tony.

"Dat ain't got nothing to do with the case," insisted Alexander.

"Don't bother, thanks," Loveland said hastily to Tony. "Things can't be worse than they've been tonight. Perhaps they'll be better. I shall try and fight it out here—till I can see my way."

"Pay my way," he might have said; but he did not wish to bring up the question of money between himself and Tony Kidd.

"It's bad enough for me to have my place upset," went on Alexander, "without having my people enticed to leave me in de lurch. 'Tain't a friendly act, Mr. Kidd. I shall be days makin' up my loss, what wid tings busted and burnt, and I shall need all the help I can get to put the restaurant in shape again."

Tony turned impatiently from the man's grumbling. "Well, if you won't let me do anything for you, you won't," he said to Loveland. "All the same, I shan't forget, and the time may come. Now I must be off, and write my story."

He put out a hand, and Val responded with his unbandaged one.

If any one had told Tony Kidd a few hours before that he would yield to an irresistible impulse impelling him to shake hands heartily with the notorious "Marquis of Twelfth Street," he would not have believed it possible.

If any one had told Loveland that he would feel pleased, even complimented, by the offer of a handshake from the journalist who had made a target of him in black and white, he would have said, "it could not happen." Yet neither thought it strange when it did happen.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

A PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE

After the restaurant was cleared and all outsiders gone, Alexander remained, wandering dolefully about the room and discussing with Leo Cohen the sum he hoped to get from the company in which he was insured against fire.

The conversation ought to have been of absorbing interest to Cohen, as eventually Alexander's business would be his, provided there were no hitch in the marriage negotiations; nevertheless, he was absent-minded, for the new waiter had not yet left the premises, and—the watchful Cohen had noticed a peculiar light in Isidora's eye when her father had brusquely ordered her upstairs, "out of the way."

She had offered no objection to going, and had bidden Leo good-night, very prettily. But before tripping away, she paused for an instant in the corridor, her face turned towards the kitchen in which P. Gordon was helping Black Dick put things to rights.

Cohen noticed this turn of the head, this fluttering hesitation, standing as he did near the doorway now stripped of the red curtain. But when Isidora had vanished above, Alexander dismissed Blinkey and the Pole, shutting the door which usually stood open, because of the draught from the broken window.

"Why don't you send that man Gordon away, too?" Cohen asked.

"Because I'm payin' him big money, and he's got to earn it," explained Alexander. "He can stay and help Dick tidy up, if it takes till twelve o'clock. It ain't hurting us. Why should you care?"

Even Cohen, who seldom erred on the side of timidity in speech, scarcely ventured to put into words the reason why he did "care." Alexander was a good friend of his, and desired warmly to welcome him as a member of the family, but he worshipped his daughter Izzie; and as he had a violent, uncertain temper, he might resent a suggestion that she could be interested in Gordon.

Cohen had a rooted objection to draughts, or fresh air in any form, except in the warmest weather; still he would have preferred a draught to the shut door behind which the girl might steal downstairs to gossip with the Englishman in the kitchen. Of course Dick was there, but he was a slave to Isidora's fascinations, and the coal-black youth who was his adjutant had now gone home to patch up burnt hands and head. Cohen hardly heard what Alexander said, so keenly was he pricking his ears for a footfall on the stairs, behind the closed door; and he answered at random while his intended father-in-law demonstrated the prospects of opening the restaurant as usual in the morning.

"See here, are you sick, or what's the matter?" snapped Alexander at last.

"Oh, I'm all right," said Cohen, "only the smoke's got into my eyes. They smart so, I can see no more'n a bat. If it hadn't been for the smoke, which always makes me blind and dizzy, I'd have been more use in the panic."

Alexander laughed. "Well, you weren't no hero. Never mind, though, most of us was put out of business. And nobody had time to see what anybody else was at. But you do seem dicky. Mebbe you'd better be gettin' home. I don't want to keep you up."

"Oh, I'm not all in yet," Cohen hastened to protest. "But can't you leave me to watch that winder, while you see after Izzie? She was lookin' white and scared. Maybe she don't like bein' left alone. Or I could go up myself, and sit by her awhile. 'Tain't late."

Alexander chuckled. "Say, you're mighty thoughtful, ain't you? But you let Izzie alone tonight. I know dat girl, and de best ting for her is to go to bed."

"It ain't much past nine," said Cohen. "I don't guess she'll go to bed yet."

"Well, she's got the hired gel to chat with—unless it's her evenin' out. Now, don't you look so glum, Leo. Izzie ain't mashed on you yet, and if you was to go stir her up when she's all on the jump, you'd do for yourself with her. I tell you dat straight. And dat ain't what you want, huh?"

Cohen admitted that it was not, and gloomily allowed his services to be enlisted by Alexander in the way of examining the furniture for damage, piling broken chairs in a corner, and sorting out those in a fit condition to be used tomorrow.

Meantime Isidora had been busy justifying her lover's worst fears.

As she reached the top of the staircase, she heard the loud slamming of the door which had been warped and blistered by the heat. Her heart gave a little jump of excitement. Already she was keyed to a highly emotional state, and in her longing for a talk with Loveland, alone, she was ready to run almost any risk. The thought that he was still in the house, so near yet so far, had been almost insupportable, and she had fully intended to have a "good cry" the moment she arrived in the sitting-room upstairs. But the unexpected shutting of the restaurant door caused her a tremor of delight. She tip-toed down again, with her heart loud as a hammer in her breast, and flitted softly into the kitchen, not daring to speak till she had quietly closed the door also, lest the sound of her voice should carry across the passage.

"Oh, Mr. Gordon," she breathed. "I'm so sorry about your poor hand; and your face is scorched, too. I do wish you'd let me do something for you."

Loveland thanked her, but said that Dick had bandaged up his hand and wrist very nicely, with a soothing application of lard on an old rag.

Isidora gave a little sniff of scorn for the negro's ministrations.

"A pretty bandage!" she sneered. "A nasty torn bit of coarse towel; and lard ain't the right thing, either. I've taken lessons in First Aid. All the girls in my school did, and I ain't forgot what I learnt. Please come with me, and I'll do you up all right. Now, don't say no, or you'll hurt my feelings. I feel ready to cry anyway, and I sure will, if you ain't kind."

Loveland disavowed all intention of being unkind, but assured the girl that he was in very little pain, and need not put her to trouble. He would soon be ready to go away, and really thought it would be better. But when he had got so far in his rather straggling argument, two tears splashed over Izzie's cheeks. More threatened to follow, and Loveland yielded incontinently. It would hardly have been human not to feel some stirrings of gratitude, and besides, Loveland hated to see a woman cry.

"Oh, I'll come," he said desperately, and followed Isidora into the passage. Her finger on her lip told him that his visit to the family sitting-room was to be a secret, but even if prudence would have turned him back at the last moment, he was committed to the adventure and could not escape.

The parlour, which also served as dining-room, was appalling in its bravery of old gold plush, and portraits of defunct Hebrew ladies and gentlemen on a claret-coloured wall paper. There was an upright piano with the latest thing in coon songs upon it; there were wax flowers under glass cases; there were terra-cotta statuettes of incredible ugliness; there were crocheted "tidies" on the sofas and chairs. On the centre table, which was covered with a blue cloth, stood a lamp that had been lighted when the electricity failed, and in its rays, filtering softly through a shade composed of pink paper roses, Isidora looked even prettier than usual—perhaps partly in contrast with her hideous surroundings.

She made Loveland sit down in a leather armchair which smelled of the tobacco her father affected; and then, kneeling on a low footstool beside him, she began to unfasten Black Dick's clumsy bandage.

"I don't like to have you wait on me," said Loveland, who, a few weeks ago, took the most exaggerated petting for granted, from pretty women.

"Well, I like to *do* it, anyhow," replied the girl, with a lingering, liquid glance. "You're so brave, I'm proud to be waitin' on you. I never knew anybody just like you, before."

Loveland thought this very probable, but merely remarked, with becoming modesty, that he had done very little.

"You were a real hero," said Isidora. "Oh! o—oh!" and she breathed little cooing sighs of pity at sight of the hero's burns. "I could cry over your poor hand. It's a shame——"

"Please don't!" exclaimed Loveland, laughing. "I can't stand any more tears."

"Did you mind when I cried?" asked Izzie.

"Awfully," said Loveland. As he spoke he smiled down at her in a friendly way; and the kindness in the blue, black-lashed eyes made the girl's heart flutter like an imprisoned bird. She had been in love with him since the first day, a little; then more and more. Now her love overflowed. It was too much for her emotional nature. She could not keep it back. And why should she try to keep it back, she asked herself, since her love must be considered an honour by this unsuccessful foreign adventurer? She felt that she was like a queen, laying down her crown at the feet of a handsome beggar—she, Alexander the Great's only daughter and heiress. There was no question in her mind but that her love would be welcomed.

"I'm glad," she almost sobbed. "Oh, you're worth more to me than anything in the world. I won't cry again if you ask me not. I'll do whatever you want me to. Pa'd 'most kill me if he knew I was talking like this. But I don't care—I don't care for anybody but you—no one else. Oh, suppose I'd let Pa make me marry Leo Cohen before I'd met you!"

Loveland was dumbfounded. "My dear girl!" he exclaimed. "You don't know what you are saying. You——"

"I do know," Isidora broke in. "I know you are poor, and in a lot of trouble, and you might have gone to prison. But you're a gentleman, all right. You're You, and that's enough. If you care about me same as I do about you, why, all the rest——"

"But I—I mean, I'm sure you—don't really care," stammered Val, checking himself on the verge of saying something rude.

It would have simplified matters if he had said it, for Isidora's opinion of her own high value as Alexander's rich, desirable daughter made it too easy for her to misunderstand.

"I do care. You needn't be afraid," she assured him. "I wouldn't have said a word—I'd o' waited for you to speak if things had been different, but I saw how you felt by the way your eyes looked a minute ago, and I wouldn't stop for manners, because, I says to myself, he's too much of a gentleman to tell a girl he loves her, when he's got nothing and she everything."

"I hope I am too much of a gentleman to——" Val began desperately, but she cut him short, with one little plump, Patchouli-scented hand over his mouth.

"I know it! That's what I said. You don't need to tell me," she hurried on. "We'll have to run away and get married. Then Pa'll forgive me. I'm all he's got. He couldn't bear me to want for anything. But it's no use asking him first. He——"

"Dear girl, I have no idea of asking him——"

"No, of course. You ain't so silly. His heart's set on my taking Leo, but I wouldn't touch him with a ten-foot pole, now. My hero! I'll marry you tomorrow."

"The devil you will!" said Alexander.

They stood together at the door, he and Leo Cohen, who had persuaded the old man at last, on one excuse or another, to invite him upstairs. Neither Loveland nor Isidora had heard the door open; neither knew how long the eavesdroppers had listened outside.

The girl struggled up from her knees, and as Loveland bounded out of the big chair she caught his arm, nestling against him.

"You villain, stealin' my gal's love, behind my back, and enticin' her to run off with you!" stuttered Alexander, purple with fury.

"I didn't——" began Val, indignantly.

"What, you didn't?" roared the Jew. "You want me to believe my gal asked you to marry her?"

Loveland started as if Alexander had struck him, and flushed to the forehead. Involuntarily he glanced at Isidora, who looked up at him beseechingly. "Spare me!" the almond eyes implored.

"No. I don't want you to believe that," he said. And how hugely he would have laughed had he been told a few weeks ago that he would let himself be misunderstood and shamed for the sake of a girl like Isidora! But now he did not feel it strange that he should make this sacrifice for her. And curiously enough, it seemed to be Lesley Dearmer's voice, Lesley Dearmer's eyes, which—haunting him always—bade him spare this common little Jewess, at any cost.

"You're a d——d sneak," said Alexander. "Ain't you ashamed of yourself?"

"No," answered Loveland.

"Shows what you are, den. You're a tief. You try to steal my daughter, because you tink you get her money."

"Oh, Pa, he loves me! It's me he wants!" wailed Isidora, weeping, yet not daring to defend her lover at the expense of womanly self-respect. What good would it do him, she thought, for her to confess who had proposed a runaway marriage? Her father would be no less angry with Gordon, and he would be a great deal more angry with her—so angry that he would watch her always, perhaps insist on an immediate wedding with Leo Cohen. No, she could not speak; and besides, it would be too humiliating, before Leo. So she only sobbed, and sobbed the louder, when Loveland gently but firmly unlinked her arm from his.

"You're a little fool, Izzie, or you wouldn't believe any such a ting," Alexander scolded her, somewhat softened by her tears. "A feller like dat—a fraud, a liar——"

"If you were a younger man you wouldn't dare to say that," Loveland cut him short. "It's you who are lying."

"What—you call me a liar? You—you cheat, you convict!" sputtered Alexander. "Take dat for your impudence!" And rushing at Loveland like an angry bull, he struck him with both podgy fists.

Isidora screamed, and seized her father's arms, struggling with him, crying out that he was wicked, cruel, ungrateful to the man who had saved his house from burning.

"Don't be afraid, I'm not going to strike back," Loveland reassured her. "He knows that."

"Yes, he knows dat, because he knows youse a coward," Alexander sneered, wheezing asthmatically. "You come over here to cheat Noo York, but you ain't done it, not much. Lucky for you you ain't in prison. Now you get out of my house, quick—see? You just git."

"That's exactly what I'm anxious to do," said Loveland. "Goodbye, Miss Alexander."

"Oh, you ain't leavin' me forever?" cried the girl. "Pa, don't send him away like this. He—he ain't to blame." She hesitated, stammering; then a wild longing to keep her lover at all hazards overcame fear and scruples. "It was me who——"

"Don't," said Loveland. "You can do no good. I shan't forget your kindness. We won't see each other again, but you must forget tonight, and marry some man who can make you happy. Goodbye once more." And pushing regardlessly past Cohen, who hovered near the door, he sent the commercial traveller sprawling as he walked out of the room.

Black Dick, who had been told to guard the broken window of the restaurant, in the master's absence, had heard all or most of the disturbance, from the foot of the stairs, and he ran after Loveland to suggest the wisdom of getting money from Alexander.

"He am a mighty wicked ole man," whispered the Negro. "You done a lot fur him, an' now he kick you out o' de house widout wages."

"I shall never get a penny from the old beast. It's useless to try," said Loveland, heavily, seeing a vision of homeward-bound ships sailing away without him on board. "Goodbye, Dick. I wish I had something to give you to remember me by, but I haven't."

"Lawd, why I'm a rich man, wid money in de bank," protested Dick. "Do you tink because I got a black face, I take suffin' off'n you? No; on de odder hand I lend you what you like, sah, and you pay me back when you like. You've tret me like a gemman."

Loveland thanked him, curiously touched; and as he refused the loan he found himself, somewhat to his own surprise, shaking hands warmly with the coloured cook.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

"WANTED: JUVENILE LEADING MAN"

Bill Willing sat reading in the coldest corner of the writing-room, in the Bat Hotel. Somehow, when he had not denuded himself of his last nickel, and could afford to pay for a corner anywhere, it was always the coldest corner, because he blithely sacrificed his chances of the warmer ones to others. But he was not conscious that his corner was cold tonight. There was that in his heart which would have made the edge of an iceberg seem a comfortable resting-place; and he was so deeply absorbed in his paper (which was one devoted to the interests of the stage) that Loveland had to speak to him twice before he heard and looked up.

At any other time he would have started, stared, and wanted to know whether Loveland's battered appearance was due to a fight or a fire; but now in self-absorption unusual for him, he noticed nothing strange. "Just look at this, my boy," he exclaimed, his eye sparkling with excitement, as he pointed to a paragraph which he had marked with red ink from a bottle on the table. The paragraph was an advertisement, in the midst of a column of other advertisements, apparently all of the same nature, and that column was one of five or six on a page entirely devoted to such advertisements. Still, the few lines were evidently of the most vital importance to Bill, and Loveland supposed he had hit on the offer of some wonderful situation, such as he had been looking for all his life.

"Wanted," was the attractive word which headed the paragraph: and that was what Val had expected; but as he read on, he grew puzzled. "Wanted—For Repertoire Work, Juvenile Leading Man. Must be tall; good looker, not over thirty; gentlemanly manners and appearance, slim figure, fashionable wardrobe on and off stage. No boozers or loafers need apply. Write at once enclosing photo, and stating experience, age, weight, and lowest salary, to Jack Jacobus, Managing Star Tour for Lillie de Lisle, the Little Human Flower; Modunk, Ohio."

Loveland read the advertisement over, half aloud, his friend following every word with the keenest interest and delight.

"Great Scott, ain't it the grandest ever?" Bill demanded, with a beaming smile.

"I don't understand," said Val. "Are you going to try for the engagement?"

"I?" echoed Bill. "Lord, no."

"Well, then what are you so excited about?" Loveland wanted to know.

"Why, that she should be a star—a real live star. My little gal, Lillie de Lisle. It's her—it's *her!* There can't be two Lillie de Lisles. Praise be, I've heard of her again. And she's way up top. She's a star."

"Oh, the girl you used to be in love with at the theatre?" asked Loveland.

"Used to be? Was, am, and will be till I end my days. Gee! Every week, whenever there was a spare dime, I've always bought this paper, to see if I could run acrost her name, and know where she was or what she's doing. Once, I seen a letter advertised for her, but that was all, till now. And here she is, a star, on a tour of her own, doin' business as a Little Human Flower. Great, ain't it?"

"Modunk, Ohio," Loveland read again. "Is that much of a place?"

"Never heard of it," admitted Bill. "But geography ain't been my speciality."

"It doesn't sound like a big town," said Val.

"No, that's so. But it's a lucky town, because the Little Human Flower's bloomin' there."

"Why don't you write, and say you'd like to have this engagement?"

"Me? Oh, Jiminy, am *I* a good looker, am *I* under thirty with a fashionable wardrobe on and off? Huh! Mine's mostly *off*." Bill laughed, and then sighed. "The good Lord didn't make me for no

juvenile lead."

"But if she still likes you, she'd stretch a point in your favour," Loveland suggested.

"Jacobus wouldn't. He was the property man I told you about, that got me the sack on account of Lillie."

"By Jove," exclaimed Val, forgetting his own troubles enough to be genuinely interested in the dramatic development of Bill's love episode. "I say, you don't suppose he's married her since?"

"Can't have; at least, not unless his wife's gone off the hooks," said Bill. "I heard of him not a year ago from one of the boys who used to supe with me. Said Jacobus had married an actress named Thora Moon, a big dark woman, in the heavy line."

"The heavy line?" asked Loveland.

"Yes. Does heavies, don't you know? But you never can tell with pros. It's married one year and a bachelor the next."

"Widower, you mean," said Val.

"No, I don't, unless it's grass, and grass don't count. I should feel mighty bad if I thought Lillie'd married Jack Jacobus. He ain't the right sort. Jinks, I wish they was advertising for a scene painter, instead of juvenile lead. Wouldn't I just whizz out to Modunk like a shot. Say, Gordon, you wouldn't like the job, would you? Great idea! Why, you're made for it. And you could give the Little Human Flower old Bill's never failin' love."

"I couldn't get them to take me, I'm afraid," said Loveland. "I'm not an actor."

"An actor!" repeated Bill, with inexpressible scorn. "As if they wanted an *actor* in a show like that, or would know one if they saw him! You're a good looker, you're young, with a tall, slim figure, and all the other qualifications named."

"Except the experience—and the wardrobe."

"Pooh!" said Bill. "Ain't you ever played as an amateur?"

"Yes, once or twice. They roped me in," said Loveland, recalling a brilliant scene in the country-house of a Duchess, and another for the success of which some of the young officers of his battalion had been responsible.

"Well, then, there you are with your experience. And as for the wardrobe—my goodness, lad, what do you want more than those swell tweeds of yours, and the dress suit you've got on? If it comes to costum parts, why, the management will just have to fit you out with some of their own glad rags—or make the ghost walk your way in advance."

"You don't seem to think much of your star's company, if you believe a raw amateur, with hardly a stitch to his back, would be good enough for them," Loveland said.

"I don't claim it's a Noo York Company," explained Bill. "I guess they're doin' the barn-storming act. Perhaps I've been kind of carried away, thinkin' of Lillie, and what it would be to get the news of her from a chum. I don't suppose there's much in this for you. Maybe you'll do better at Alexander's, now you're a kind of star yourself—"

"A fallen star," laughed Loveland. "Look at me, and see the marks I got sliding down the sky."

Then, for the first time, Bill noticed that his friend's hair was singed and his face reddened on one side, his white shirt covered with black spots, and his left hand partly in, partly out of, a clumsily made bandage.

"Moses! But you have been through the wars!" exclaimed Bill. And he listened with growing excitement to Loveland's version of the fire.

"Alexander ought to give you a partnership," he commented at last, though Val had made no boast of his own part in the affair.

"He's chucked me," said Loveland.

"Je—*rusalem!* Why, in the name of all that's decent?"

"It was in the name of everything indecent—'villain, cheat, liar, coward'—that he did it. According to him I was all those, and ought to be in prison; though what he meant by his weird accusations, I can't imagine, unless he just hit on whatever came first. I suppose it must have been that. He thought I'd been making love to his daughter."

"Gee! And had you?"

"No. It was a misunderstanding. But I couldn't explain. And the long and short of it is that I crawled in the dust for a few wretched dollars, which it seems I've got to lose, after all. I don't know how I'm to touch any more—unless I do as you say, and get this place with your friend, the Human Flower."

"You'll go?" asked Bill, brightening.

"Rather. If they'll have me. But I haven't even a photograph—"

"Come out with me," said Bill, seizing him by his sound arm. "I know a place where they do you a tin-type by flashlight for ten cents, and finish while you wait. I'll stand the racket. You can turn your good side to the machine; by the time the answer comes, your hair'll have grown out and you'll be looking A 1. Hurrah! Three cheers for Lillie de Lisle, the Little Human Flower, and her new Juvenile Lead!"

CHAPTER THIRTY

SHOW FOLKS

"Mo—dunk!" shouted a brakeman, slamming the door of the day coach in which Loveland had traveled since some vaguely remembered hour in the night, when he had changed trains.

He had dozed, sitting on the hard red seat, his head leaning wearily against the window-frame; and he started up at the yell which for an instant seemed part of his dream.

But then, everything lately had been a dream. His weird experiences in New York; the absence of replies from his mother and the London Bank, in answer to his cabled appeals; the coming of the telegram from Jack Jacobus, accepting the very modest terms named at Bill's suggestion; his start from the magnificent Grand Central Station in New York, where the new "juvenile lead" had found his ticket awaiting him. And now, as he bundled half dazed out of the local train he had boarded some hours ago, the dream suddenly grew more bewildering than ever.

What a contrast was this little country "depot" with the splendours of the Grand Central in New York! The rough frame building was little better than an exaggerated shed, and no town was to be seen, across the desolate waste of brown fields which billowed round the railway shelter and its high platform, like a wintry sea round a small, bleak island.

Through an open door of the passengers' waiting-room Loveland caught a glimpse of a squat stove, rising like a fat-bodied grey dwarf from a big box of sawdust, and a man who had been warming his hands came out of the room as the train stopped. There were also three or four other men, lolling on a bench outside the window, but they were long-bearded, soft-hatted, tobacco-chewing individuals who had evidently dragged themselves hither through the mud for the excitement of seeing a train come in, and took no interest beyond that of curiosity in the passengers.

The man who came out of the waiting-room was a very different order of being, and almost offensively conscious of the difference. He was fifty, perhaps, and tall, with a swaggering walk, which caused the shabby fur-lined coat he wore to swing like the skirt of a woman's dress as he moved forward. He had on patent-leather boots, cracked with old age and caked with new mud. His rather long, straight hair and the heavy double curve of his moustache clearly owed their raven tint to artificial means, but his big chin was blue, and the thick brows over a pair of light grey eyes were still black. The nose and mouth, though ineffectively cut, contrived to express cruelty and an insolence which was accentuated by the upward tilt of a cigar between the strong yellowish teeth and the downward tilt of his badly kept silk hat.

Every line of the face and figure, every article of clothing, bespoke the fifth rate, seedy actor who has parted in his time with most things, except his self-conceit.

The idlers on the bench stared at him, then at the newcomer, and regarded with lazy curiosity the meeting between the two: for this gentleman in the tall silk hat and fur overcoat was Mr. Jack Jacobus, come to claim Mr. P. Gordon, the new member of his company.

If it had been possible for Loveland's heart to sink lower—which at the moment he did not believe—it would have sunk at sight of Miss de Lisle's manager. But, he asked himself, what else had he a right to expect from the advertisement, and Bill's assurance that it would be useless to demand a higher weekly screw than ten dollars, the management paying board?

One quick glance, and the glass-grey eyes had taken in each detail of Loveland's appearance, from the smartly made travelling cap, which still kept its shape, down to the neat brown boots. He approved all, it was evident, except the battered gladstone bag which Bill Willing had bought extraordinarily cheap at a pawnbroker's sale, as a gift for his friend Gordon. This Loveland carried in his hand, and he saw the actor-manager's gaze rest sardonically upon it.

In a deep, measured voice, as theatrical as the rest of his personality, Mr. Jacobus enquired if he had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Perceval Gordon. Then when answered in the affirmative, he delivered himself of a few polite words of greeting.

"Glad you got here all right. Don't know what we should have done if you hadn't turned up. Our juvenile lead came down with typhoid at our last week's stand, and we've been fakin' our best ever since—any old play we could, that had the fewest men, and the lot of us doublin' parts till we was ready to drop on the stage with the curtain. Got the checks handy for your big baggage?"

Loveland had to explain that he had no big baggage, and under the changing, freezing eyes of Jacobus felt as insignificant as a crushed worm. Until very lately he had not known the meaning

of this sensation; now, he was becoming accustomed to it as to a daily worn coat; but never perhaps had his pride been more flatly ironed out than in this brief instant.

"What—no wardrobe?" demanded the manager; his tone of friendly condescension to a new member of his company altered to one of bullying suspicion.

"My wardrobe is here," said Loveland, holding out Bill's present.

"Sorry I forgot to bring a magnifying glass," sneered Jacobus. "But see here, I call this false pertences. How are you going to play a new part every night of the week, some of 'em costum ones, all out of a grip no bigger than your pocket? You ought to have told me what you *didn't* have—if it wouldn't have taken you too long."

"*You* ought to have told me I had to play a new part every night," said Loveland, and the young man and the middle-aged one, looking each other straight in the eyes, conceived for one another an intense dislike. "I was given to understand by a person of experience, that I should have enough to get on with until I could buy something—if necessary."

"Well, that depends on how soon you buy," returned Jacobus, less bitterly. "You knew very well that you'd have me on the leg, once you got out here at this Godforsaken place, with your ticket paid. Our show ain't made of money, especially the past two weeks. Heavens! What a frost! We've been livin' on our gleanings from last month (when we were going like smoke) and countin' on the new juvenile lead to help work up better business. That's why I'm so sore at your cheek, Mr. Gordon, shootin' yourself out West with what you stand up in. But as you *are* here, we must make the best of a bad business. The girls may like you even with whiskers on your shirtcuffs, and I suppose among us, we'll rig you up somehow, out of our theatre trunks. That's what you were layin' for, eh?"

"Look here, if you're going to insult me much more, I shall turn round and go back, if I have to walk," said Loveland, cold, hungry, tired and miserable, but with just spirit enough left in him to be furious.

Jacobus saw that he had gone too far, if the juvenile lead were not to slip through his fingers. He did not want that to happen, though he already had an uneasy jealousy of P. Gordon. So used was he to bullying the members of his company, male and female, that he had hardly realised what was likely to be the effect of his sarcasm, until he saw the expression of the newcomer's face.

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed, laughing. "Don't you know a joke from an insult in your part of the country? It give me a start to see you land without a wardrobe, and I have a right to be mad; but I've just said we'd make the best of it, and help you out all we can. What can we do more? I suppose you don't grudge me a bit of fun? Come along to the great and glorious city of Modunk, which must have as many as one thousand inhabitants. Hope you don't mind goin' on Shanks's Mare? It's the only kind we'd get in this town—even if we ran to something better; but it ain't far—about a mile and a half; and your grip can't weigh much."

Loveland wished that he had no heavier burden to carry than his bag, but he kept the thought to himself, and trudged off with the arbiter of his destiny. The loungers on the bench, too far away to overhear the conversation, guessed that it was not altogether of a friendly nature, and transferred their quids of tobacco to their cheeks, in order to discuss the situation with a new, if fleeting, animation. As he passed them to descend the platform steps to the muddy country road, Loveland caught the words, "Show folks."

"Show folks!" Yes, he was one of the show folks.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

THE DIGNITY AND DELIGHT OF BEING A JUVENILE LEAD

"Show folks—show folks! Say, come look at the show men!" Impish little boys and girls yelled to each other, taking up the refrain from cottage to cottage along the roadside, on that Via Dolorosa which led to the town of Modunk.

Loveland pricked all over, as if with a million stabs of tiny pins, but Jacobus only laughed, and said that it was a good advertisement. Business had been bad during the week at Modunk which would come to an end that night—Saturday; but he attributed this ill luck to the fact that the company had been forced, for lack of a juvenile lead, to choose plays which were not the most popular in their repertoire. Things would be different next week, he hoped, when they were going across the river into Kentucky, to a small but lively show town, whence the advance-agent sent encouraging accounts.

He questioned Loveland sharply concerning his theatrical experience, seeming to incline towards distrust since the incident of the travelling bag. Very soon he found out, in all its nakedness, the truth which had been veiled in the letter dictated by Bill; that Mr. Perceval Gordon's experience had all been as an amateur, and not very extensive at that. However, as Bill had prophesied, he did not appear to think it mattered much, though he sniffed and "hum'd" a little, by way of curbing the new man's self-esteem. "You've got a good stage presence and voice," said he,

"though I don't know what the folks here will think of that English accent of yours. Pity you can't talk United States. They're mighty sharp at guying anything foreign or affected, so don't be knocked silly if the little boys in the dime seats mock you a bit. Just keep your hair on, and go along as if nothing had happened, and they'll shut up in a minute or so, when they've got used to you."

This was—as Bill would have said—a new "proposition" to Loveland; that he had an "English accent," which might be objected to on the ground of affectation. He had heard a good deal in England about the American accent, and had chaffed Jim Harborough because of it, but as after all the English nation had more or less invented the language current on both sides of the water, he had supposed that theirs was, without question, the only right way of using it. However, opinion seemed to differ over here, and he did not choose to argue with Mr. Jacobus.

The actor-manager watched his new acquisition furtively as he plowed through the mud, and at last interrupted himself in describing with some acerbity the absent members of the company, to remark suddenly: "You look like a soldier."

"I am a soldier," Loveland replied before he stopped to think.

"Oh!" said Jacobus, regarding him keenly. "English army, of course?"

"Yes," answered Val shortly, regretting his frankness.

"H'm! What were you—sergeant?"

Loveland could have broken out into savage laughter. He, a lieutenant in the Grenadier Guards, asked by this seedy theatrical man if he were a sergeant! But he kept his countenance, for fear of committing himself unwittingly under the catechismal fire.

"No. I wasn't a sergeant," he replied.

"H'm! See here. I hope you didn't leave the army—er—on short notice, eh? You know what I mean?"

"Do you mean, am I a deserter?" Loveland flashed out, turning red.

"Well, excuse me if I'm offensive. But the arm of Edward is supposed to be a long one, if any of his red coats take a vacation without permission, and *I* don't want to get into no trouble with kings. We may not be Noo York stars, but we're a pretty respectable crowd, take us all round."

"Well, set your mind at rest," said Loveland, swallowing his wrath. "I'm not a deserter, and I shan't bring disgrace upon your company."

"All right, all right. I'll take your word for it. I guess there's nothing else to do, as you're the only man on the spot. But say, the more I look at you, the more I have a kind of sneaking idea I've seen your picture lately. Did you get your photo stuck in any of the theatrical papers, since you landed?"

"No," Loveland replied; but flushed again, instantly guessing where and in what connection Jacobus must have seen his portrait—a sketch, or some snapshot, perhaps. Evidently the man did not yet associate him with anything in particular, but the connection between the new juvenile lead and a certain Englishman made notorious by one or two New York papers might at any instant link itself in Mr. Jacobus's head. This Loveland was far from desiring: not that he thought his value to the management would be decreased by the discovery—rather the contrary, judging by his experience with Alexander—but because he could not bear to repeat that experience.

Luckily, Jacobus did not pursue the subject, which apparently interested him less than others. When he had described the members of his company according to his own conception of their characters and social status, he went on to tell the new recruit something about the parts he would be required to play. Then it was that Loveland learned the esoteric difference between being a leading man, and a "juvenile lead."

Jack Jacobus was himself, it seemed, leading man for Miss Lillie de Lisle, the Little Human Flower: "Heavy Lead" he called it, but to the Heavy Lead apparently belonged all the really good parts in the company's repertoire. Their productions struck Loveland as being wonderfully good for a strolling troupe, playing week by week in extremely small towns, but Jacobus laughed when he remarked that it must be expensive to obtain the rights of such popular pieces as Sidney Cremer's, for instance, and to put them on the stage properly.

"Properly!" he echoed, grinning. "Well, that depends. Folks here ain't perticular about scenery. They don't travel, and don't have no chance to see anything better than we give 'em. I guess I may as well let you into the secrets of the prison-house, for you're one of us now, and you'll soon find out for yourself, anyhow, what we are, for good and bad. We carry six men in our show, counting me and you, and there ain't many pieces we put on, except Sidney Cremer's comedies, where there's less than a dozen or fifteen male characters, sometimes more. We all double; sometimes each one of us—even me—the leading man, because I ain't proud, and needs must when somebody drives—manages to do two or three small parts besides his own. It takes it out of us, but it's all in the night's work. What characters we can't double we leave out. Same with the women. We carry four of them, counting Lillie herself, and they earn their money. You see, we *must* bill popular pieces, melodramas and comedies mostly, or we shouldn't get no houses; so we can't choose plays with few characters to please lazy actors. As for the rights to produce—why,

we don't trouble ourselves about them, any more than we do about the pasts of our juvenile leading gentlemen. It simply don't run to it. What we want we take. Good motto in this life, eh? There are fellows make their livin' by writin' down the words and biz of successful plays, in shorthand, copyin' 'em out at home, and then sellin' 'em on the sly to poor but honest show folks like us, who must live but can't afford luxuries. It's quite an industry. 'Pirates,' the Puritans call our sort, but it don't kill us—or our business. And as we always work only the smallest towns, which the stage papers don't touch, it ain't as risky as you'd think, though once in a way the police do shove their noses in where nobody wants them, and I confess I'm a bit scared about Sidney Cremer's new piece, which we're just puttin' up. Say, you're lookin' kind o' sick. I hope *you* ain't one of the Puritans, are you? Don't they have shows of our sort in your country?"

Loveland said he really didn't know; but as he hastened to add he was not a Puritan, and anyhow, Mr. Jacobus's business was his own, that gentleman did not feel called upon to translate into words the thoughts his eyes had begun to express.

Mr. Perceval Gordon, it appeared, was expected to play seven parts, at the least, during the season, and must be "letter-perfect" in the first one by that very night. It was, however, but a small rôle; that of an old man, who conveniently expired at the end of the first act in great agony. It was, the manager explained, a "fat acting part," though there weren't many lines to speak; and—yes, certainly, a juvenile lead was occasionally expected to play old men or, indeed, to do anything he was asked to do; and an amateur like Mr. Gordon might think himself jolly lucky to get varied experience under such stage management as he would find in the Human Flower's company. This particular piece, a melodrama called "The Dead Hand," had been chosen for the closing night of the engagement at Modunk because the part for the juvenile lead wasn't too long or difficult to "get up in" with one rehearsal, which they would have after noon; and indeed the Dead Hand was to be that of Mr. Gordon himself. He would appear as a ghost near the end of the last act, and wave the said hand behind a gauze, with strong lime-light turned upon it; which was the scene which made the part so "fat." Also, incidentally, at a ball, he would be asked to "walk on" as a young gentleman of fashion. Could he waltz? Good! Then he should have Mrs. Jacobus for his partner, as she liked a decent dancer in that scene, where she had experienced considerable trouble with awkward brutes who stepped on her "party dress." Mrs. Jacobus—known professionally as Miss Thora Moon, was—her husband went on to state—Miss de Lisle's leading lady, who played adventuresses, villainesses, and important parts of that ilk, to the Human Flower's soubrettes and ingenues.

"My wife had some money—when I married her," he mentioned, with an introspective look, accompanied by a faint sigh. Thus Loveland was enabled to guess how it was that Mr. Jacobus might have been induced to forget his early *penchant* for Miss de Lisle, Bill's "little gal."

A bitter wind was blowing, but exercise kept Loveland warm, and he did not envy Jacobus the overcoat, which the actor was obliged to hold together with one cold, red hand (as several buttons were missing) while he frantically seized the brim of his silk hat with the other, each time they turned a corner. At last they came into the town of Modunk, which consisted of one long business thoroughfare, named, of course, Main Street, and various other avenues sacred to the home, branching off from it at right angles and regular intervals.

Main Street was paved with red brick, and most of the residence streets were content with a coating of tar, or else they wallowed in their native mud. The shops, or "stores," as Jacobus called them, appeared depressingly unattractive to Loveland, though they were not inferior to those in villages of the same size in England or Scotland. Millinery, "dry goods," and groceries were sold in the same establishments, and seemed to the uninitiated eye to be hopelessly mixed in some of the show windows. Most of the private houses were built of wood, painted white, brown, grey or pale green. They had outside shutters to the windows, such as Loveland associated with Southern France, and stood surrounded with neat little "yards" fenced off from each other and publicity by painted or whitewashed palings. There were, however, a few more pretentious houses, rising from among less important neighbours, with the air of being mansions. They were of brick, or stone, but Loveland liked the little frame houses best, and was hoping he might be lodged in one of them, when Jacobus stopped in Main Street, in front of an ugly, new building constructed of wood and brick. There was a kind of veranda, above which appeared a large signboard with the words "Smith's Hotel" in green and gold letters.

"Here we are," said Jacobus, sighing as he looked at his mud-encrusted patent leathers. "The whole crowd's here. I'll show you to your room, and by the time you've had a wash, if you want it, dinner'll be ready. I guess you'll be ready for *it*, too!"

"What—dinner at half-past twelve?" asked Loveland.

"You bet. They'd like to give it to us with our breakfast if they could, so as to get the work out of the way. You'll find the crowd in the dining-room, and I'll introduce you. After dinner you can have a look through your part in "The Dead Hand" if you get through in time; everybody who's on in your scenes has a call at the theatre for rehearsal. That's for half-past one, sharp."

Loveland made no comment on these announcements. He walked into the hotel behind Jacobus, who, being manager of the company, heavy lead, and stage-manager combined, naturally marched in front of the insignificant "juvenile," who carried his wardrobe in his hand.

There was a narrow, uncarpeted passage, with an uncarpeted and still narrower stairway leading steeply up to regions above. Also there was a strong, nay, over-developed smell of dinner, which

could be all too easily divided into its component parts: corned beef and cabbage, with perhaps a bodyguard of onions. As they went upstairs the smell followed, but on the next story began to mingle with a suggestion of hot iron, coal-smoke, and unopened windows.

"One more flight for you," explained Jacobus. "They ain't got too much accommodation here; and Miss de Lisle, me and my wife, and the other ladies are on this floor; gentlemen above."

They continued to ascend, and the actor-manager stopped before the first door at the head of the second stairway which led to the top story of the hotel.

"Here you are," he said, and with a light knock which was a notification, not a request, he flung the door open.

On a narrow bed visible from the threshold a young man, hardly more than a boy, was stretched, reading something that looked like MSS. He glanced round, but did not move, on seeing Mr. Jacobus and a stranger.

"I thought you said this was my room?" exclaimed Loveland, startled.

"So it is, and there's your room-mate. Didn't know whether you'd be in, Ed. I can introduce you to each other, right now. Mr. Ed Binney, our property man, prompter, and second villain. Mr. Perceval Gordon, of England, our new juvenile. Now you know each other; and I guess, Eddy, you can put Mr. Gordon up to all he needs to know."

This was worse than the Bat Hotel, where each man who earned twenty-five cents could have his own cubicle. But, now, Loveland was not paying his own way. The "management" was to do that; and feed him, too. As he had but a quarter in the world, thrust upon him as a loan or gift by generous Bill, Loveland was not in a position to be critical. Here he was, and here he would have to stay, till he heard from home, or something "turned up."

As for hearing from home, he had begun almost to despair, for his two cables had remained unanswered now these many dreary days. Still, after an interval of more waiting for a telegram from his mother, he had written to her and to Betty Harborough, ashamed to take outsiders into the deepest secrets of his humiliating adventures. But at best, it would be a fortnight before Bill Willing could forward to some address yet to be given, a letter from across the sea; and meanwhile Loveland was a slave of necessity—if not of Jack Jacobus.

That gentleman, having acquitted himself of his duty to the juvenile lead, disappeared, banging the door, leaving the old occupant and the new occupant of the mean, bare room to make each other's acquaintance.

Mr. Binney did not think it worth while to get up, as the juvenile lead was no guest of his, but he raised himself on one elbow, and observed Loveland with an interest that might or might not develop into friendliness. He was thin, pale, and delicate-looking, but he had bright eyes—almost too bright for health—and a firm chin.

For a moment Val resented the youth's existence so keenly that he did not trust himself to speak; but brief reflection reminded him that after all, he was the intruder. A short time ago he would have been intolerant of circumstances even less disagreeable, such as finding himself forced to share a cabin on shipboard, or a *wagon-lit* compartment, after expecting to travel alone. But much water had gone under the mill of his pride since then; and besides he had learned, greatly to his own surprise, that kindly, agreeable human beings can be found in the lowest classes and queerest circumstances.

Ed Binney looked as though he might have pleasant qualities, if approached in the right way, so with amazing self-restraint Loveland refrained even from the mild insult of a disgusted glance. He said, in his nice voice, that he hoped Mr. Binney wouldn't mind his coming, as he really couldn't help himself. Whereupon Mr. Binney grinned, showing teeth white as a girl's, and replied that if it weren't Mr. Gordon it would be someone else, who might be worse, as it struck Mr. Binney that Mr. Gordon would at least be fond of washing himself.

To this Mr. Gordon responded that there were few things he liked better, but it seemed as if there wouldn't be much opportunity at Smith's Hotel. You had to do it in sections, with a washbowl, said Mr. Binney, but never mind, you got there just the same, if you were in earnest. Then they both laughed, and Binney exclaimed with evident relief, that he was jolly glad Gordon wasn't the sort of boy who put on airs. He'd been afraid at first sight that was the kind he was, but now he guessed it was all the high collar. The feeling was for low, in Miss de Lisle's company, yet he didn't know but those stove pipe ones had a sort of style about 'em.

Then he bounced off his tremulous cot (which had a patchwork quilt somewhat the worse for contact with his boots and was the twin of another little iron-framed bed in a far corner). He showed his room-mate "the ropes"; in other words, which "bureau drawers" were at the newcomer's disposition; where he had better keep his toothbrush, and so on. He confided to Loveland the fact that he himself had not been long in the company, but had come from a better one, which he would now regret if the "one night" stands had not been too much for his strength. "If your lungs are always playing you tricks, you have to put up with barn-stormers, for at least they give you week stands, and most of the hotels throw in fires free," he explained. "I can see that you've stepped down in the world a bit, too, so we ought to have a fellow feelin' for each other."

While Loveland made himself presentable for the early dinner, Ed Binney went on to sketch the members of the "crowd," though in a manner very different from the manager's sarcastic descriptive efforts. He said that Jacobus was a tyrant and a bully, but that he could act; that everyone except Miss Moon was afraid of "J. J.," and she wouldn't be afraid of an Indian chief on the war path: that Miss de Lisle didn't dare say her soul was her own, or that black was black, if old Jack remarked that it wasn't; that Jacobus had done a very good thing for himself in getting hold of Lillie as a star, although she had no money—for she was a peach, a live wire, just the sort of little gal to be a "go" at towns like this. "Folks are wild about her, she's as pretty and as dainty as they make 'em, a whole haystack above what they generally see in these barns," went on Ed. "But she needs managin'—and gee, Jack and his wife do manage her. But the old girl's jealous. I don't know how long the show will last, for if she says stop, Jack stops, you bet. He's as scared of her as everybody else is of *him*. She runs the shebang, and there's two of her sons by her first husband in it. They can't act, and they can't look, but by gum, they're good to their mother!"

Into the midst of his discourse crashed a ferocious dinner-bell, and in sheer self-defense they rushed downstairs, in the hope of stopping the clamour by their presence.

The dining-room opened off the long passage on the ground floor, and already other members of the company had assembled for the midday meal, which must be eaten in haste before the rehearsal.

Mr. Jacobus was there, in the act of sitting down between two ladies at the head of a long table; but seeing Loveland he condescended to summon him with a gesture.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

BILL'S STAR

Val could have laughed aloud as he imagined the old self of a few weeks since—the young and popular officer-in-the-Guards self—obeying the beckoning finger of such a man. But he walked towards it like a lamb, and was introduced to Mrs. Jacobus (Miss Moon) and Miss de Lisle.

As Star of the company, Miss de Lisle ought of course to have come first, but Miss Moon, the heavy lead ("heavy" in more senses than one) was not a lady to submit to such distinctions.

She would probably have said that Lillie de Lisle was a star only because it suited the convenience of Mr. and Mrs. Jacobus to head the troupe, financed by their money, with a pretty enough little soubrette, likely to take the popular fancy.

Miss Moon's first sweeping glance at the newcomer was one of self-conscious, important condescension; but seeing that he was an extremely handsome, well dressed young man, with an air and an appearance widely different from the tenth-rate actors of her acquaintance, past and present, her face and manner changed. Instead of posing as the manager's wife, she set herself to vie with Lillie de Lisle in youthful charm, as she sent forth a radiant, long-lashed look to fascinate Mr. Perceval Gordon.

She was a big woman of forty-two or three, with the splendid ruin of what had been a fine figure, an erectness of head which partly concealed the existence of a double chin, a complexion spoiled by a love of rich food and constant use of powder, singularly wide-open dark eyes fringed with painted lashes, and a good deal of bright crimson hair edged with rusty brown at the roots.

Beside Miss Moon, Bill's "little gal" looked like a tiny fishing boat bobbing under the lee of a large schooner; but she was a pretty creature whose curly hair was naturally almost as golden as it glittered, grey-blue eyes which ought to have been mischievous and merry, but were anxious, a clear, rather freckled white skin, and the piquant nose and innocent smile of a child.

These ladies were not dressed as tidily as their best friends might have wished, but Loveland had grown used to Isidora, and did not pick flaws lightly. They were both very cordial to him, somewhat—it would have seemed—to Mr. Jacobus's contemptuous annoyance; and then, at Miss Moon's suggestion, Ed Binney introduced Mr. Gordon, across and down the length of the table, to all the other members of the company.

There were a few non-theatrical diners in the room, commercial travellers, apparently; but they were at the far end of the table, and were not addressed, though they were on nodding acquaintance with several of the actors and actresses.

The latter were two in number besides Miss de Lisle and Mrs. Jacobus. Miss Ruby St. Clare, whose mission was to act small parts, and play the piano, was of the startled fawn order of young female, evidently not long out of amateurhood; and Mrs. Winter, who had passed the age when it was necessary to preserve her maiden name for programmes. She was a reserved and suspicious-looking woman, who watched her husband with short, sidelong glances of anxiety either for his conduct or his health. As for him, he was a thin, dejected, grey little man who suffered apparently from a broken heart or a shattered digestion. His lips worked, and the lids of his eyes, which winked almost continually, were red-rimmed. He seemed acutely conscious of Mrs. Winter's constant scrutiny.

The remaining male members of the company were Mrs. Jacobus's two sons, Tom and Bob Eccles. They were between twenty and twenty-five, and like their mother, though one was fat, with the lazy smile of a Buddha, and the other, who through a cast in his eye just missed being handsome, inclined to be truculent.

Loveland had intended to take a chair next his room-mate, but Miss Moon made a place for him between herself and Buddha—smiling Bob. As everybody except Jack Jacobus and the Winters talked and joked continually, it was surprising how fast they ate. The corned beef and cabbage, the onions, and the tinned American corn which, with other eatables and uneatables, surrounded their plates in a wreath of little earthenware dishes, disappeared as if by conjuring, to be swiftly replaced by apple-pie and cheese that magically vanished from the face of the table in their turn. Nearly everyone drank large cupfuls of milky coffee with their dinner; and twenty minutes after beginning the meal, all had finished, with the exception of Loveland, who was not accustomed to giving his food such short shrift. He rose with the others, however, and a few moments later the company was straggling in a procession to the theatre.

But after all, it was not a theatre, and even courtesy gave it no more high sounding name than "hall." It stood at the end of Main Street, its brick front wall plastered with wonderful coloured posters representing the most sensational scenes in the Human Flower's repertoire. To reach the stage it was necessary to mount a long, mud-caked staircase, and to pass through the auditorium. As for dressing rooms, they did not exist, for it had been a second thought of some light-minded town council, to turn the hall into a place where theatrical representations might lawfully be produced: but a space on either side of the stage had been curtained off with sheets, shawls and squares of canvas, ingeniously coaxed to hold together. These screens reached unevenly from twenty-four to twelve inches of the floor, and at worst an actor in dressing himself could be seen no higher than the knees—unless, perhaps, a too bright light behind the partition might reveal his whole person *en silhouette*.

Loveland was anxious to talk with the Star about her old friend—if not love—Bill Willing; and he had hoped on starting to walk by her side; but Miss Moon, seeing his desire, had instantly frustrated it by calling him and beginning to talk of the part he was about to rehearse. As old "Dave Dreadnought," he was supposed to curse her with menaces, and he felt that it would not be difficult to do so realistically, even in the character of Loveland; but he contrived to listen politely, if coldly, to the story of her first marriage at the early age of fifteen. "I'm not quite sixteen years older than my eldest son, who is over twenty now," she said, and did not look pleased when the juvenile lead found no more tactful comment than an absent-minded "Is it possible?"

On the stage he received the short MS. part of Dave Dreadnought, which Mr. Jacobus had not after all been able to unearth before, and was allowed to glance it over while the scene of his "dying curse" was being set. He was too inexperienced to remember what in gay, amateur days he had learned of stage directions, and Jacobus was inclined to be sarcastic at his expense; but both Miss Moon and Miss de Lisle, as well as Ed Binney, befriended him, whispering hurriedly what "down centre," "up left," "take the stage," or "wait on the prompt side" meant; and thanks to their good nature he got on reasonably well. He was called upon also to rehearse the ball scene, where he "walked on" as a young man of fashion, and had the privilege of dancing with Miss Moon before dwindling, in the last act, to a mere Dead Hand. All the "business" had to be repeated again and again, until at last he was confident, and the stage manager almost hopeful.

It was five o'clock by the time Jacobus snapped irritably: "You'll *have* to do, anyhow"; but as afternoon tea was not a custom in the Human Flower Company, they missed little by absence from the hotel. Still, Loveland had found no chance for a private word with Lillie, who remained ignorant of his acquaintance with Bill Willing.

At six o'clock a meal, which called itself supper, was ready; and having bolted a cold edition of dinner, eked out with tinned peaches and cups of tea, actors and actresses marched forth in a body to begin the evening's work.

The curtain did not rise until half past seven, but this was Saturday night, and the town was eager for its entertainment. The young girls and their escorts liked nothing better than to see the "show men and women" walk past them up the hall, on the way to that thrilling region known as "behind the scenes," therefore at least a score of persons were seated in the dismal auditorium, munching apples or candy, and cracking peanuts, when the Human Flower and her company filed in.

A few little boys on the cheap benches at the back whistled, clapped their hands, stamped on the floor, and made "cat calls" as a greeting to the players, but those saluted took no notice, and skurried by like hunted things. Miss St. Clare hastened to her seat at the piano, near which an elderly quadron had already begun to tune a fiddle, and melancholy Mr. Winter remained at the door to help the ticket seller, until it should be time for him to "make up" as the heroine's millionaire parent.

The gentlemen of the company (Loveland had already learned that they never spoke of each other as mere "men") dressed behind one partition, the ladies behind another, and the crowding could scarcely have been worse in the Black Hole of Calcutta. Nevertheless, everyone was more or less good natured. Costumes of a sort, and odds and ends of grease paints were offered to Loveland who, to his own surprise, was shaking and perspiring oddly with stage fright.

"What rot!" he roughly scolded himself. "As if an audience in a tenth-rate country village mattered! What do I care whether or not I know my part, or what they think of me?"

But the queer fact remained that he did care, and his heart thumped faster than it had thumped when he was roused one dark night to fight his first battle. As he saw what personable looking men his companions became after manipulating a few bits of grease-paint, putting on wigs and carefully-kept stage costumes, he began in spite of himself to take this queer theatrical engagement of his more seriously. He wanted to act well; he wanted to please Lillie de Lisle, and to satisfy Ed Binney, who was wishing him luck; he wanted to make a good impression on the pretty bright-eyed country girls who had stared at him with interest as he passed through the auditorium.

There were not nearly enough local stage hands employed in the theatre, and acting was not the only work the actors had to do. They helped place the scenery, and change the settings; they flew about like distracted demons, half dressed, with suspenders flying, turning a burglar's den into a millionaire's drawing-room; and between the bewildering alterations of scene, there was no rest for the sole of anyone's foot.

How they ever got themselves out of one costume into another in time, how they ever remembered which of their many doublings came first, which last, Loveland could not conceive; but, standing in the wings waiting for his own dreaded turn, he was filled with an increasing respect for the barn-stormers, male and female. They could act, too, most of them, which seemed to him the strangest part of all, for he had not expected to find the satellites of Bill's little Star twinkling with the light of talent. As for his own performance, he realised before it had begun that such histrionic efforts as had won him applause when an amateur in London would not be good enough to gain him admiration as a professional in Modunk. It was another thing when, as a handsome young soldier, Lord Loveland had swaggered easily about the stage, pleased with himself and pleasing everyone else, because everyone had come with the intention of being pleased.

Here, in remote little Modunk, the audience was evidently far more critical, and if it didn't like what it saw, it said so audibly with a voice from the cheap seats, or at least indulged in a prolonged fit of bored coughing. If Loveland could have gone on "as himself," as Jacobus had said, he might have captured the fancy of the girls; but as old Dave Dreadnought in a wild wig, and moth-eaten beard lent by "Pa" Winter, the new addition to the company could conquer the audience only by sheer force of acting.

Fortunately for Loveland, he was not obliged to walk onto the stage in answer to a cue, or it seemed to him that he could not have moved. It was bad enough to be "discovered," in the act of being murdered; and as the moment came when he would have to make his first speech, his blood was beating like a drum in his temples. His throat felt dry, and when his cue to speak was given by Jacobus with meaning emphasis, he could only swallow, and glare. Not a word of the carefully rehearsed part could he remember, and involuntarily looking out in front (a thing Ed Binney had warned him not to do) it seemed as if the rows of faces down below the yellow footlights were leaping up at him like a wave.

If he had seen the mocking grins or heard the titters which his morbid fears and exaggerated sensitiveness led him to expect, he would have collapsed into gasping helplessness, and died without giving the famous curse on which the rest of the play depended. But to his intense, almost agonising relief, the eyes staring up at him were eager, excited. The people were taking him in earnest! They were not laughing at him. He had power over them; and suddenly he felt able to make use of it.

Just as Jacobus bent over him, frantically glaring, ready to prompt and swear at the same time, Loveland's frozen hesitation melted into words and gestures, the right words, the right gestures. Jacobus sighed a great sigh of thanksgiving, and Val delivered his curse with a transport of zeal. He was half frightened at his own explosiveness, but the audience enjoyed it, and when the curtain went down upon his death there was a round of applause from the audience.

"They liked it all right," said Miss Moon.

"Are they doing that for me?" Loveland asked, incredulously.

"Why, of course," she replied. "You were the star of the scene."

"It would have to be a mighty rotten Dave not to get a few hands on his curse," said Jacobus. "Never saw one yet bad enough for that. It's the scene, not the actor, they clap."

But even this cold douche did not depress Loveland. Though dead as Dave, it was his business to rise again in the third act as a young man of fashion—a youthful butterfly from an ancient chrysalis—and drunk with the sweet draught of triumph, he made the change gaily, as happy for the moment as if he were playing before an audience of kings and queens.

He had dressed, and was lurking in the wings again, watching with some interest the arrest of the leading man for his (Loveland's) murder, on false evidence snakily given by Ed Binney, when Miss de Lisle flitted noiselessly up, very insufficiently disguised as a boy.

"I suppose you *do* remember that you're a young English Lord?" she whispered, anxiously.

Loveland started, and stared. Had she found him out?

"In your next scene," she explained.

"Oh," said Loveland, relieved. "Am I—er—a lord?"

"Yes. Didn't Jacobus tell you? But perhaps he thought it didn't matter."

"It doesn't seem to," retorted Val, smiling faintly at his own hidden meaning.

"You're supposed to be the son of the Duke of Highgate. Pa Winter's the Duke, you know. Of course, though, you haven't seen the whole play yet—only your own scenes, so you can't keep track of everything. You only have to walk on; or rather *waltz* on with Miss Moon, you know; and when she goes off, and I come on in girl's clothes again, you must say, "The next is mine, I believe," with an English drawl. But the part's down on the program as 'Lord William Vane.'"

"By Jove, I know Willy Vane. He's in the Black Wa—" began Loveland, but he bit his lip and broke off abruptly.

The Human Flower laughed. "I don't suppose *your* friend's a lord, though!"

Loveland did not reply, as the choice lay between a fib and an affirmative.

"You ought to know how lords behave, more than any of us," went on the girl, "as you're an Englishman. I suppose you've seen some?"

"Yes, a few," said Val cautiously.

"Did you ever get a chance to speak to one?"

"Now and then."

"Were they very haughty?"

"Not all of them."

"Well, as you've seen them you'll know just how to act, and you *look* real swell. This is an exciting play, ain't it? And my! how it does makes us all work. This is my only quiet time, and I guess you're tired. Perhaps you'd rather watch Jack Jacobus's big scene than talk to me? I have to go on, anyhow, in about four minutes."

"I'd rather talk to you than watch, if you'll let me," said Val.

"Well, as long as you don't make yourself too interesting, so I miss my cue! J. J. will be cross if he sees us whispering here, but he's too taken up with himself and his wife in this scene to notice much."

"That's lucky, because I have a message for you from an old friend of yours, that I've been wanting to tell you all day," Loveland began hastily, not to waste one of the four minutes. "I wonder if you remember him? Bill Willing?"

"Bill Willing!—a friend of *yours*?" the girl spoke sharply, in her surprise.

"Then you haven't forgotten him."

"Forgotten him? I never will, to my dying day."

Her voice quivered a little, for, like most actresses of her type, her emotions were as easily played upon as harp-strings.

"Those are almost the words he used about you," said Loveland, interested in Lillie's part of the broken love melody, as he had been in Bill's. "Only—his were stronger."

"What were they—exactly?"

"Shall I tell you, really?"

"Yes, quick—quick."

"He said he always *had* loved you, and always would love you till his dying day."

"Oh!" Lillie de Lisle gulped down a small sob. "I thought he'd forgotten all about me—long, long ago. He never wrote."

"No. He told me he didn't dare, or something like that, but he couldn't resist sending a message by me."

"If you *knew* what it is to me to hear from him again! How in the world did you meet him?"

But that was a long story, and before Loveland could begin to sketch it, the Human Flower heard her cue. With professional instinct she darted out of the entrance on to the stage, and took up her part, as if she had thought of nothing else since she laid it down.

It was not until the end of the third act that there was the smallest chance to continue the talk so suddenly broken short. Loveland had to change back again into the beard, wig, and bloodstained clothes of murdered Dave Dreadnought in order to appear as a ghost, and wave his Dead Hand under the remorseful villain's nose. But this act of retribution was reserved for the end of the play; therefore, encouraged by Lillie, Val stood half concealed in the shadow of some disused

scenery, talking of Bill to Bill's Star.

He told her of Bill's dog, Shakespeare, the tiny creature "who made up a bit for the lost 'little gal.'" He told her how Bill generally contrived to put aside a dime each week, to buy a stage paper, solely in the hope of finding news of her. He described Bill's delight at hearing that she had become a "Star," with her own company, and explained how it was by Bill's wish and advice that he had written to ask for his present engagement.

"If only it *was* my company, really," sighed the poor little Star, "wouldn't I just send for Bill to come out? But I haven't got any more say than the property man, and J. J. used to hate Bill, because—because he was jealous. You see, that was before Jacobus married. Oh, since you're a friend of Bill's and he told you he cared about me, I can talk to you as if I'd known you for ever. If Bill had asked me to marry him, I would, in a minute. But he never did. I wasn't sure he ever really cared, till what you said tonight. He was the best man I ever knew."

"I'm not sure he isn't the best I ever knew, too," said Loveland.

"I'd have sooner *begged* with him than be a queen with a crown on my head, if he wasn't the king!" sighed Miss de Lisle. "Don't *you* feel that way, too, about love?"

"Yes," Loveland answered. "I didn't always: but then I used not to understand."

"It's too late now," Bill's Star went on. "We shall never see each other again."

The words echoed in Loveland's head. "Too late now; we shall never see each other again."

The Human Flower's thoughts were far away with Bill Willing. But at least she knew where he was, and was sure that he loved her, while Val did not even know the name of the place near Louisville where Lesley Dearmer lived, and he was sure that she did not love him. Yes, he was sure of that, though perhaps there was a time, he told himself, when he might have made her care.

Instead of trying to win her when he had the chance, he had asked her advice about the best way of making love to other girls. Oh, he deserved all he had got, he thought with sudden fury—all—even to being a waiter at Alexander's, and a leading juvenile under the management of "J. J."

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE

"Gordon, come to our room directly after dinner. I want to talk to you," said Miss Moon. "Not a word to anyone, mind."

She spoke in a low voice, with an air of mystery, stopping Loveland on the stairs, and then passing with a significant look and a finger on her lips, as a door shut sharply somewhere above.

Of course she took it for granted that he would accept the Royal invitation which was a command, and did not need an answer. Equally of course Loveland knew that he would be knocking at the door, at the moment desired, though he was puzzled by the request and the secretive way in which it was made.

It was only a week that day since he had joined the company, but the longest week of his life, save one. Already the time when he had not been a barn-storming country actor seemed distant. He was "old man" or "dear boy," with all the men except Jacobus, and "Gordon" with the actresses. He had heard the life-story of almost everyone among his comrades, male and female; knew why, by evil fate or mere fluke, they had lost splendid and well-deserved chances of gracing Metropolitan theatres; had grown to look upon them all, even Buddha, as fellow beings, and was doing his worried, wearied best with seven new parts committed to memory in as many days.

If Lesley Dearmer were an actress, and it were her company instead of Lillie de Lisle's, he said to himself, how happy he could be in spite of all hardships; for the longing to see Lesley was never absent. He regretted her desperately, and the chance he might have had with her—the chance he had thrown away. He dreamed of her at night, instead of living his troubles over again, and in involved fancies often saw her acting with him on the stage, in the place of Bill's "little gal." Always she seemed near; always she was in his thoughts; but perhaps this was partly because someone had mentioned incidentally that Ashville—where the company was playing now—lay only about thirty miles from Louisville.

Somewhere near Louisville she lived, and if he were Lord Loveland, with money in his pocket—even a little money—instead of being just a strolling actor named Gordon, with two suits of clothes to his back, he would have tried his hardest to find her. He no longer regretted the hopelessness of finding favour in the eyes of American heiresses, because he was homesick for the light in Lesley's sweet eyes, the only woman's eyes that had ever mattered seriously to him—except his mother's. Nothing had happened, really, to make money of less importance to him; rather the other way, yet money did not seem as important as it had, and he told himself that he was well punished for not asking Lesley to marry him. But now he had let her learn to despise

him. And being Gordon, the barn-stormer, instead of Lord Loveland, he would have avoided a meeting with the girl if it had come in his way. He could not have endured to be seen by her as he was now, and even should his luck change—as it must before long—with news from home—there would still remain between them as a barrier Lesley's scorn of him which he had taught her to feel, and her knowledge of all his ridiculous adventures. What a contrast to the pictures he had painted for her of his reception in America! With her impish sense of fun, the humorous side of his welcome by New Yorkers must have appealed to her intensely, he was sure, and he did not think that even when he ceased to be P. Gordon, Lesley Dearmer would ever care to think of him seriously again.

She had been very frank that last morning on the *Mauretania*; and many times since, he had recalled every word she had said to him as they leaned on the rail watching the ship draw into the New York dock. Lesley would feel, as he began to, but even more, that everything which had happened "served him right." He could almost hear her pronouncing sentence, smiling, yet in earnest. How she must have laughed at his fallen pride, and the wildly farcical things such merry humourists as Tony Kidd had doubtless put into the papers! He had become a mere figure of fun for America, and therefore, for Lesley Dearmer, who had never been a respecter of persons; and the fear that the Human Flower's Company might play at Louisville had been hot in his mind, until Ed Binney reassured him. Louisville was not for the "likes of them," and they would never get nearer such an important town than they were now. Soon, they would be out of Kentucky, and in Missouri: indeed, the "date" following Ashville, was in the latter state, and Loveland had been advised that his forthcoming address would be Bonnerstown. Only the day before his meeting with Miss Moon on the stairs he had written to Bill Willing, asking him to send on any mail to Bonnerstown, Missouri; and now the lady's mysterious summons gave him an uneasy moment.

He had supposed that his acting was satisfactory, and had worked hard over the learning and rehearsing of his parts, seldom getting to sleep before five in the morning, then dropping off with a MS. in his hand as well as in his head. But what if Miss Moon meant to break the news that "J. J." thought he could not act well enough, and that he must expect his discharge?

Loveland had little appetite for dinner, though the hotel at Ashville was better than at Modunk, and the cooking was good Southern cooking. Immediately after the meal he went upstairs and knocked at the door of Mr. and Mrs. Jacobus's room, with no feeling of strangeness in doing so, because he had learned, since joining Miss de Lisle's company, that for "pros" bedroom was another word for parlour.

The stage manager and his wife were both there, Jacobus smoking, in sulky silence which he broke only with a grunt by way of greeting for the "juvenile lead." But Miss Moon made up in cordiality for her husband's coldness.

"Mr. Jacobus is cross with me," she announced coquettishly, "about you."

"About me?" Loveland repeated, puzzled and vaguely uncomfortable.

"Yes. There's an idea of mine I want to talk to you about, and he says you'll blab it to the others. But *I* say you won't if you promise you won't. That's so, isn't it?"

"Of course," answered Loveland.

"And you do promise, don't you—and that you won't say a word to a living soul, if I tell you a thing in strict confidence?"

"I promise," Loveland returned imprudently, impressed with the idea that he was to hear some comment on his own acting.

"There! That's all right, then, I trust you. Yes, I just *will*, J. J., so there! I guess I have a right to my say in this show, haven't I?"

J. J. answered by a shrug of the shoulders, but it was a shrug of resentful acquiescence, and showed that he acknowledged his wife's supremacy—the eternal supremacy of the Golden Calf.

"Sit down, and make yourself at home," went on Miss Moon, smiling on the handsome young man, who was not much older than her sons. "Full Moon" was her nickname in the company, and Loveland thought, as she cordially indicated a chair by the stove, that her figure merited the *sobriquet*.

"I know you're a great friend of *Lillie's*," the lady slyly began again, when she and Loveland were seated near the fire, and J. J. had drowned himself in a theatrical paper. "But all the same, you must admit that her acting gets worse every day. She's so awful careless! And she's failed to go down with audiences here. We've done rotten business."

"The house has seemed good every night," said Loveland.

"Ah, it's *seemed* all right; but it's been half paper. It's mighty discouragin', for me and Mr. Jacobus, I can tell you, after the money *I've* put into the show, and the work *he's* put in. The fact is, it's so discouragin' we're thinkin' of makin' a change; breakin' up the company, in a way, and then startin' again, with only the ones we *really* want in a new crowd. Would you like to join?"

Loveland looked her straight in the face, with almost brutally frank disapproval on his. The extra touches she had given to her hair, and eyelashes, and complexion for his benefit, were all in vain.

She might have been a block of painted wood, for any admiration in his eyes.

"You mean, you're going to send Miss de Lisle away?" he asked.

"We're going to send ourselves away from *her*," Miss Moon corrected him.

"Leaving her in the lurch!" exclaimed Loveland; with that uncompromising truthfulness of his which was a virtue or a vice, according as one had reason to regard it.

The big woman flushed darkly through her powder. "There's no 'lurch' about it!" she defended herself with a new sharpness in her tone. "I don't intend to shell out any more of my good money carting Lillie de Lisle around the country as a star, that's all. I suppose I have a right to do as I choose with my own? *You* oughtn't to complain. I'm offering you a chance that lots of real actors would grab. You can go with the new company, and have better parts, and better pay, than what you're getting now. But you'll have to choose, right away, between me—between us and Lillie de Lisle. Well, what do you say?"

"I say that I choose Miss de Lisle," said Loveland.

Miss Moon burst out laughing, hysterically.

"There, I told you what you'd get!" ejaculated her husband. But she shook her shoulders angrily, seeming to transfer to him all the resentment Loveland had roused.

"Let things alone, can't you?" she snapped. "Gordon's only guying, ain't you, Gordon? Or anyhow, you don't understand. When I said 'choose between us' there's nothing *to* choose, for Lillie de Lisle hasn't got a thing to offer you, and we have a lot. We can bust her up and when she's bust, she is bust. Why, she hasn't a dime to bless herself with, I shouldn't think. She ain't the savin' kind, and she won't even have any advertisin' paper to go along with, if she wanted to go along on her own. Her name ain't printed on any of the posters; I took care of that, starting out. The slips with 'Lillie de Lisle' are all separate, joined on to the posters with paste—and as for her litho, she's welcome to *that*. She looks a fright, bad enough to scare crows. The pictorial paper's *ours*, every sheet of it, and we can start another show inside two days. All we've got to do, is to wire a Chicago agent for a new star, if I don't choose to do the starring myself, and as many folks as we want. Now, you see how things stand, don't you?"

"I think I do," said Loveland.

"Well, what do you decide?"

"The same that I decided before."

"Oh, you do, do you? Ain't you silly! You won't take a good thing when it's offered you?"

"I won't take the thing you've offered me."

She bounced up from her chair, her large face flaming. "Very well, then, all I've got left to say is, I wish you joy of your choice, and—*good* afternoon!"

"Good afternoon," said Loveland, rising, and walking towards the door.

"Wait a minute!" exclaimed Miss Moon, stopping him as he turned the handle. "See here, if you please. You're no gentleman if you play the sneak, and tell."

"I've given you my word not to do that," Loveland assured her.

"Mind you keep it! I wash my hands of you," cried the angry woman, and thinking that he might as well take this as his cue for exit, Loveland left the room.

"Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned," he heard her husband quoting with a vicious laugh, before there had been time to shut the door.

Loveland went up to his own room, more than a little troubled. He had learned to like Lillie de Lisle, not only for Bill's sake, but for her own. She was a sweet, bright little creature, a lady by nature, though not by birth or education; and if she had a chance, might even yet—in spite of bad training—become a charming actress. The Moon woman was jealous of the star's youth and prettiness, of course; and now she meant to play her rival a shameful trick, yet he might not warn the poor girl because of that stupid promise he had given.

It was a new thing for Loveland to trouble himself about the affairs of his acquaintances; but he knew too well now what it was like to be deserted by friends, cold-shouldered by the world, not to have learned how to feel for others. He was genuinely uncomfortable about Lillie, but he could only make up his mind to stand by the deposed star whatever happened to her, and to himself. For the present, he did not see what else he could do, bound as he was to silence. But there was one comfort, he consoled himself: a new company could not be formed in a minute. This was Saturday. They would all go on to Bonnerstown next day, no doubt; perhaps Mrs. Jacobus would reconsider the spiteful decision to which her henpecked husband agreed with evident reluctance. In any case, there were a few days in which to plan. Loveland hoped that he might hear from England in another week; and at worst, salaries were payable on Saturdays. He would be the possessor of ten hard earned dollars that night.

Dinner had been at twelve, because of the *matinée* which would begin at two o'clock. Now it was already after one, and everybody had started for the theatre, except himself, the Jacobuses, and

Ed Binney, who was ill with a racking cough, and keeping his room till the last minute.

Loveland went upstairs to see how Ed was feeling, found him ready though coughing hard, and they walked to the Ashville Opera House together.

After all, salaries were not paid that night. J. J. informed the expectant members of the company that business hadn't "run to it." They must wait for their money till next week. Bonnerstown was a bigger place than Ashville, and there was every prospect of better things for the future. Two or three of the actors and actresses wheedled a few dollars out of the manager, to "go on" with; but they were "old fakirs," as they would have said themselves, and knew how to manage such matters. Loveland, however, took the news quietly, as he had begun to take the various blows which fortune successively dealt him.

In these small towns, the hotel breakfast was from seven till eight, or until eight-thirty by favour; and on Sundays, if one were a quarter of an hour later in coming down, nothing actively unpleasant was said aloud, though there might be mumblings and dark looks. On this Sunday morning Loveland availed himself of the last amount of grace, hurrying down at a quarter to nine lest he should be told, grumpily, that breakfast was cleared away.

Ed Binney was in bed, for his room-mate had volunteered to carry something up, but Lillie de Lisle, "Pa and Ma Winter," and Miss St. Clare were still at the table.

"Have the others finished and gone already?" asked Loveland, for the two Eccles were usually the last to appear, unless it were "J. J.," who invariably took his wife's breakfast upstairs before beginning his own.

"No. It's queer, none of them have been down yet," replied Mrs. Winter. "They wrote cards on their doors, saying they weren't to be disturbed or their fires to be made, and didn't want breakfast. The cards are up yet. It's the first time they've ever done such a thing since I knew 'em; and that's two years."

"I do hope they haven't committed suicide," whispered Miss St. Clare, who batted on detective stories.

Loveland did not offer any opinion, but he flushed slightly on hearing the news, and went on eating his lukewarm breakfast, with eyebrows drawn together in an anxious frown. Could there be any connection between this mysterious and unprecedented conduct on the part of the manager, his wife, and his wife's family, and the secret proposal made yesterday to the juvenile lead?

Loveland had told himself then that the threatening storm would not break until the following week at earliest, but now a disquieting idea had jumped into his head. So disquieting was it, that when he had finished his breakfast he paused before the door of the room occupied by the Eccles brothers, and disregarding the card conspicuously pinned on the panel, knocked very hard.

No answer came, and he knocked again, still harder. Then a third time, so violently that no natural sleep could have resisted the clamour.

By this time the landlord, the landlord's son, the landlord's wife and niece, and several commercial travellers were in the passage or on the stairs.

"They're dead drunk, or else they've hooked it," suggested one of the latter.

"Scott! Jacobus ain't paid for his week yet!" exclaimed the landlord, his thin yellow face turning a shade yellower. He rushed to the closed door on the floor below, and pounded furiously with no result.

"The snides! I'm hanged if they ain't gallivanted with my money, and made me the expense of bustin' in my doors and gettin' 'em mended!" wailed the proprietor of the hotel.

Luckily for his feeling and pocket, one of the commercial travellers was an amateur locksmith, and the door, which hid the secret of the Jacobus family, was soon opened. The bed had not been slept in. The room was clear of all Jacobus's belongings; and the landlord reproached himself for not being "fly enough" to suspect treachery earlier. He had actually seen, with his own eyes, Mr. and Mrs. Jacobus carrying bundles to the theatre, when starting for the matinée, and again before the evening performance, but had thought nothing of it, because his acquaintance with Jacobus had extended over several years.

"I was a crazy loon to think he was all right," the defrauded man groaned. "And then, business was A 1 the whole week, so I wasn't keepin' my eyes peeled for any larks. I'm big enough, and old enough, and ought to o' known better. But the rest o' ye ain't goin' to take a shine out o' me like that. I keep your hotel luggage till you hand over every red cent of your board, and I wish to goodness the law wasn't too cranky to give me holt o' your theatre trunks, too."

"I can't believe they've really gone and left us like this," pleaded the little Star, wide-eyed and pale, though unnaturally composed. "Let's wait and see, before we think the worst. Somebody'd better run over to the Opera House and find out if their things are there. If they've sneaked them away in the night, why—then I'll *have* to believe; but I won't before."

"I guess my son's there and half-way back by this time," growled the landlord. "Meanwhile, I'll just have a go at t' other lock."

He had the go, and by the time the opening door had revealed emptiness, bad news had come back from the theatre. The worst had happened. With incredible stealth and cunning, the manager and his family had slipped away in the night, leaving nothing behind them but a stranded, broken, and penniless company.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

MAROONED

After consultation in the room of the Star, it appeared that the funds of the deserted six amounted to exactly six dollars, or, if equally divided, one dollar apiece.

Lillie, who had been—more or less regularly—in the enjoyment of thirteen dollars a week, was in the habit of sending all she could spare out of her salary to a bedridden sister in a semi-charitable institution. Pa and Mrs. Winter were suspected of having "something up their sleeves," but they produced only two dollars to match Lillie's two—and after all, their joint earnings were but ten dollars a week. As for Ed Binney, he supported parents, one of whom was almost blind, the other nearly crippled with rheumatism. Besides this regular call upon his purse, he was obliged reluctantly, from time to time, to buy a tonic which might keep his delicate chest in working order. Miss St. Clare was chronically penniless; and everybody knew that Gordon had received no salary yet.

The landlord, disappointed at finding very little of value in the rooms of the actors (with whom it was a cautious habit to safeguard their most cherished possessions in their theatre trunks), had threatened in the first outburst of anger to turn them all into the street; but Loveland and Lillie de Lisle argued that he would lose nothing by waiting an hour or two, until matters had been discussed and something of advantage to everybody perhaps arranged.

But, at the end of a long and gloomy talk, nobody had found anything brilliant to suggest. There was too little money to be of any use, said Pa Winter, who was by nature a pessimist; and for his part he didn't see what was to become of them all, unless they went to the poor-house, and waited for something to turn up, or induced the town authorities to organise a subscription.

"I won't go to the poor-house, and I won't be an object of charity," exclaimed Lillie, pluckily. "I've been in bad scrapes before, and got out of 'em somehow, and I bet we all have, unless it's Gordon—so I guess we can again."

Relieved by Mr. Jacobus's treachery, of his obligation to be silent, Val repeated his conversation with Mrs. Jacobus yesterday, adding that he had been very far from suspecting her real intention.

"That's because you're an amatoor, dear boy," said Binney, coughing harshly. "If they'd let out as much to one of *us*—but they'd have had too much gumption. If only you could have put us wise we'd o' been on the watch; but don't think we're blamin' you, for we ain't. You did the straight thing, accordin' to your lights. Full Moon was always green jealous of Miss de Lisle, but after you joined the show, if she'd been a cat with four legs instead of two, she'd o' spit and scratched. As it was, she did the next best thing—tried to take you away under her arm, and spite Lillie. For the rest of us she didn't care a tinker's dash, one way or another. Then, when you turned on her, and blurted out just what you thought of her and her schemes, and how you meant to stand by Miss de Lisle, she was as sour on you as she had been sweet. I bet she's chucklin' this minute, thinkin' of our plight. It'll be nuts to her."

"Can't we get at them and punish them somehow?" Loveland wanted to know.

"Takes money to do that sort of thing, even if we could. It would cost the boss of the hotel more than Jacobus owes him for us all, to go to law, now they've vamoosed, out of the state, too. As for us, we're not *in* it—except the soup. They had plenty of money, too, the beasts, for Full Moon's a regular oof bird, with 'most a thousand dollars of her own over and above what J. J. has 'blowed,' and the Ashville business *has* been jolly good, I don't care how they tried to stuff you up. They must have lit out with a pretty penny—to say nothing of all the company's scenery, paper, and MS. plays. We're stripped clear of everything but our theatre trunks, and they'd have taken them if they'd dared."

But Loveland had not even a theatre trunk.

"If we could get up some kind of a benefit performance, those that are left of us," he suggested, after thinking very hard for a few heavy minutes, "we might make enough to go—somewhere."

"Good idea, if we had a play," said Eddy. "But we—no, by Jinks, we *have* got one!"

"What one?" asked Lillie de Lisle, clasping her hands.

"Sidney Cremer's 'Lord Bob.' Old J. J. gave me the MS. to copy into parts only three days ago, and I was too seedy to hustle much with it. He said if the parts were ready to distribute Monday it would do, and I was going to finish by then, sure. I suppose he dasn't ask me for the MS. back, for fear I'd smell a rat—or else he forgot. Anyhow, I've got the play, and half the parts are done."

"A new play by Sidney Cremer ought to be a draw even here," said Lillie, "and 'Lord Bob' is *bran* new—as new as tomorrow's bread."

"Lord Bob," by Sidney Cremer: Loveland remembered seeing the posters up in New York, and for the last year or two the young American playwright's name had been well known even in London. This piece Loveland believed had been produced for the very first time on his first night in New York. Yet these barn-stormers had got hold of it!

He made some remark that showed surprise, and Lillie, laughing rather sadly, replied that a New York man with whom J. J. was in touch had offered to give him the play cheap. "We don't pay the author anything," she said. "Seems mean, doesn't it?—and I suppose it's a kind of stealing. But I've been brought up to it, ever since I was a 'pro'; and we don't hurt the playwright much by producing his pieces in places like our week stands. No company that pays author's fees comes here once in a blue moon. The question is, could we put the play on, and could we get the Opera House for any nights this week? It was Jacobus who knew all those things, not me. I was in his hands, and I just let myself drift."

"There are only three women—two girls, and an old lady in the play. That would suit all right," said Eddy, eagerly. "As for the men, it isn't quite so easy—never is; but there are only five. One's a servant, another a policeman; and there's no scenery to speak of. I guess we could fake. I don't feel very grand, but I'll try and write out the rest of the parts by tonight, in case we can get the theatre, and bring the stunt off."

"I'll write out the parts you haven't done," said Loveland. "I'll find the manager of the alleged Opera House, too, and have a talk with him."

"Do. A real heart to heart talk," urged Lillie. "Tell him we mean sharing terms, of course. If it really can be fixed up, it's pretty sure the landlord'll keep us all on spec."

Loveland, who was now the only able-bodied young man of the party, and whose idea it had been to get up the entertainment, went out at once, luckily catching the local manager of the grandiloquently named Opera House, just as he was virtuously setting forth to church.

Jacobus, it seemed, had "settled up all right" with him the night before, and he was surprised to hear of the flight. But he had his bride—a third bride—with him, and feared that she would not consider it decorous to discuss theatrical business in the street, on Sunday, on the way to church. He would have sent the "show man" away rather cavalierly without any definite answer if the bride, who, like an intelligent baby, was already beginning to "take notice," had not put in a word for the handsome young Englishman.

"I don't care if we are five minutes late," said she, conscious of a hat which would receive the more appreciation if all the other hats were already in their pews.

So the manager relented, and admitted to Loveland that the "house" was "open" for three nights. After that, the Dandy Lady Minstrels were coming to finish out the week. Their advance agent would arrive on Monday, without doubt, and "bill the town," so that a makeshift show wouldn't stand much chance. As the Opera House was free, however, the marooned actors might have their chance, but it was a "spec" for him—the manager—and ordinary sharing terms weren't good enough. He stipulated for two thirds of the profits, if any, above expenses, and would not unbend, though the bride motioned her compassion for the actors, with lifted eyebrows.

All the rest of the day, Loveland was busy. He finished copying the parts, which must be learned and rehearsed, so that the play might be produced tomorrow night.

There was a newspaper in Ashville, which came out once a week; and the company decided, after a stormy debate, to spend one of the six dollars in buying from the office large sheets or rolls of the coarse white paper on which this weekly publication was printed. Having secured a good supply, and obtained black paint and a big brush from a sympathetic sign-painter, who was a customer of the hotel, Loveland set to work, with Binney's aid and direction, to manufacture some crude posters.

He announced in black letters, so gigantic as to be almost convincing, that the principal members of the Little Human Flower's All Star Company had been persuaded to remain for a special three nights' engagement, in order to produce the sparkling comedy, "Lord Bob," New York's Latest and Biggest Success, by the popular playwright, Sidney Cremer.

At least a dozen duplicates of this announcement he produced, after hours of painstaking labour, which cost him a cramp in his right hand, if not in his temper.

It really was nervous work for an amateur, drawing out and spacing the huge letters with pencil, then filling them in with thick splashes of black paint—especially as the paper was thin, sometimes letting the big brush break through, and costing another sheet, another hour's toil. But it was extraordinary how much interest Loveland took in his self-appointed task, how easily controlled was his impulse to be cross when Ed Binney or "Pa" Winter interrupted him with a suggestion.

He felt that the company's present plight had been brought about partly by him; through his friendship with Lillie (how could Miss Moon guess it was for Bill's sake?) and his thoughtless promise of secrecy. Therefore he was inclined to do his best to atone; and the *blasé* young soldier who once had thought all work and most pleasures a bore, toiled like a slave through a whole day

and half a night to save Ed Binney fatigue.

After midnight, when the impromptu posters were ready, Loveland and "Pa" Winter went out together with big rolls of paper under their arms, and a huge pot of flour paste, stirred up (for the sake of Gordon's *beaux yeux*) by the hand of the landlord's niece, over the kitchen fire.

They had no right to "grab spaces," Pa Winter pointed out; and if they put up the new paper on top of the old the agent of the "Dandy Lady Minstrels" would ruthlessly cause it to be covered over with his own bills. Still, despite these pessimistic prophecies, Loveland distributed the advertisements of "Lord Bob" as well as he could, hoping for the mercy or the negligence of the coming rival.

What remained of the night he spent in committing to memory the part of "Lord Bob," for which, without a dissenting voice, the five other members of the company had cast him.

It was a part which a London or New York leading man would have studied for two weeks, rehearsed for three, and finally played with joy mingled with misgiving. But Loveland could not afford artistic scruples. The play was the thing, and the acting must take care of itself.

They went out to rehearsal early next morning, and were thankful that there had been neither rain nor snow to destroy the fragile posters. In front of one which Loveland had put up on the face of the Opera House, stood a girl and an old man, talking in low voices.

"They're reading about the play and making up their minds to come," muttered Loveland to Lillie de Lisle, with whom he had walked to the theatre. As he spoke, the pair turned and stared sharply for an instant at the actor and actress. Loveland was disappointed. After all, they did not look like the sort of persons who would care to attend a performance given by barn-stormers. The girl was a lady, the man a gentleman. They were well dressed, their faces had a cultivated expression, indescribable yet unmistakable. Altogether, they were of a different order from the people who had composed the audiences at the Opera House during the past week.

"I shall certainly write and tell them what's going on," remarked the girl to her companion, who was probably her father. "It's a shame. Something ought to be done."

"We might telegraph, if you think it would be worth while," replied the old man.

Loveland heard the words, spoken as the pair turned away to walk down the street, towards the residence part of the town, but he attached no importance to the disjointed sentences. The affairs of the Human Flower Company were occupying his mind for the moment, to the exclusion of all else. He was not even thinking of lost Lesley Dearmer, or wondering whether there would be a letter from his mother forwarded by Bill to Bonnerstown this week.

Everybody was in deadly earnest, and the rehearsal went off very well, considering all its disadvantages. They had another in the afternoon; and by that time, they learned joyfully, a few seats had actually been booked in advance.

Ed Binney's cough had not improved, but he was kept up on strong, hot coffee, and they got through the performance that night, two men short, almost without a hitch. Nevertheless, though "Lord Bob" was a great New York success, as Sidney Cremer's comedies always were, and bristled with brilliant scenes and bright dialogue, it was a little above the heads of an average Ashville audience.

A few well, though plainly, dressed ladies and gentlemen were in the front seats, and all seemed to know each other, laughing and talking together between the acts; and among them, through a peephole in the curtain, Loveland recognised the nice-looking girl and old man he had seen staring at his home-made poster in the morning. The rest of the audience, however, were of the usual sort, and preferred wild melodrama to sparkling light comedy.

The profits of the first performance, and the next, were not what Val had expected, though the acting of the company improved; but on the last night Loveland tried to hope that Ashville would turn out in full force.

Having set the first scene himself, in default of a stage manager or competent stage hands, he applied an anxious eye to a small "spy-hole" in the curtain, and peeped out.

His heart sank. The house was half empty. But it was early still. There was hope yet. People were coming in. There was the old gentleman and the girl he had seen before, finding their way once more to the front seats. Someone was with them; they were bringing guests. That looked encouraging!

Val lingered at the "spy-hole."

The girl and her father sat down.

With them were Lesley Dearmer and her aunt, Mrs. Loveland.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

PIRATES!

For an instant Val thought of nothing but the heavenly surprise of seeing the girl he loved.

Recognition brought a shock of joy, and a wave of love which had been held in check for a time by the weight of misfortune, as the waters of a stormy river in flood are held back by the shut gates of a lock. He had known that he loved her, too well for peace of mind, more passionately and purely than he had thought it was in him to love. But until he saw her face looking up, as if at him, yet unconscious of his gaze—the dear, charming face he had longed for through all his miseries, scarcely dreaming ever to see her again—he had not realised how utterly precious it was, how entirely indispensable in his life.

A wild impulse rushed over him to call her name—"Lesley—Lesley!" and spring from behind the curtain, as if they two were alone together in a world of their own. But after the first luminous instant, the joy of her presence was blotted out in darkness.

He remembered everything; remembered that he was Perceval Gordon, an actor of the submerged tenth, a wretched, penniless barn-stormer, who for the moment came near to being an object of charity.

When he had bidden Lesley goodbye, he was a splendid being who looked down from his heights, and, though loving her, saw her impossible as a wife. Their friendship had begun by being somewhat of a condescension on his part—from his own point of view, at least; and she, half amused, half angry, had seen that point of view quite clearly, nor had she ever attempted to change it, to the last.

At the thought that the curtain would ring up and show him as he was now, to the astonished eyes of Lesley Dearmer, he could have run away, out of the theatre, anywhere—it mattered not where—if only she need not see him, need not know that the magnificent Lord Loveland and the miserable P. Gordon were one.

His blood surged up to his head, throbbing in his temples, and tingling in his ears, but through the confusion of his senses penetrated the knowledge that he could not go.

This trial of endurance—it seemed to him the hardest of all the ordeals he had been forced to face during that fortnight which was a decade—he would have to go through, as he had gone through the others; because, to evade it, he must be worse than a coward. He would be coward and traitor as well; and under all his faults there was something which would not let him be traitor or coward.

Selfish he had been, but the shell of his selfishness had been broken by many hard knocks, and the real self, once so comfortably housed within, was finding itself, though all a-shiver still with the cold.

Let him suffer as he might and must, he couldn't desert these people whom he had undertaken to help out of the trouble in which by his inexperience he had landed them.

He was responsible for putting on "Lord Bob," and his was the principal part. Crudely as he knew that he played it, the performance could not go on without him. If he refused to act the curtain could not ring up, and the money in the theatre would have to be refunded to the disappointed audience. There were not many dollars there—at all events not many would remain for the company after the local manager had taken out his share, but there would be enough with what had come in on the two previous nights, to pay the ever-growing bill at the hotel.

Loveland felt that it would have been almost easier to shoot himself than to give the signal for the curtain to ring up; yet the moment came when he could delay no longer. He was not actor enough to forget in his acting the world beyond the stage. He did not lose his lines; but, conscious of Lesley's eyes upon him, he felt as stiff, as jerky in every movement, as a mechanical doll.

It was worse between acts than when he was on the stage, for he pictured Lesley's head and her aunt's bent near to one another, while he and his affairs were discussed in whispers, perhaps with stifled laughter. It seemed to him that the evening would never end; but at last the curtain went down on the third act, and Loveland was making a "bolt" for his dressing room when one of the stage hands intercepted him, holding out an envelope.

"Say, you're the manager of this show, ain't you?" asked the man.

"I suppose I am at present," said Loveland, not attempting to evade responsibility.

"Well, then, this is for you," and the letter was in his hand.

"To the Manager of the Company producing 'Lord Bob,'" was the address pencilled in an attractive handwriting, which might be that of a man or a woman.

Val hesitated for an instant, and then tore open the envelope. On a sheet of the Ashville theatre paper were written the words, "A friend and agent of Sidney Cremer will be obliged by a few words with the Manager of the Company, in the private room of the Manager of the Opera House, kindly lent for the occasion."

Loveland read the communication, and handed it to Ed Binney, who was passing. Ed gave a long, low whistle, which set him coughing again, and said, "Whew! This is the last straw, isn't it?"

"Why?" asked Loveland.

"Don't you see? Someone's put the author on to us. You know we're pirates—regular play-snatchers, don't you?"

"Yes," replied Val. "Jacobus initiated me into the mysteries. But what can they do to us?"

"There's a big fine for the offence."

Loveland laughed. "I wish Mr. Cremer joy of it."

"Oh, that's all very well, but if he cuts up rough, he can make us a lot of trouble, I'm afraid, though I don't know much about such things. I only know we were always running the risk; but in these small towns there ain't much danger, as the shows don't get noticed by the dramatic papers. I believe Jacobus was never caught. But we're copped this time, sure enough. I wouldn't go into the lion's den, if I was you. Let the lion come to us, at the hotel—if he doesn't find out beforehand that we wouldn't make a meal worth eating."

"Meanwhile, perhaps, he'll have the police 'attach' the luggage or something," argued Loveland. "Heaven knows, I haven't got much; but the rest of you have, and you can't afford to lose it. No, I'll go and face the music. Perhaps when Cremer's agent understands the fix we're in, he'll let us down easy."

"Well, maybe you're right," Binney agreed. "But it seems a shame you should have to stand up and be shot at alone."

Loveland laughed dubiously. "I'm riddled with bullets already. I'll wipe the paint off my face, and go tell the fellow to aim straight and have done with it."

"I'd see you through, if I wasn't such a crock," said poor Ed, coughing.

"Go and tell the others what's up," Val advised him. "They may be able to strike camp and get away with the supply wagons while I engage the enemy."

Three minutes later, Loveland was at the door of the local manager's room. He opened it, and found himself face to face with Lesley Dearmer, who was standing there, alone.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

THE WHOLE TRUTH

"Miss Dearmer!" he stammered.

"Mr. Gordon, I believe?" she said primly.

She wore a simple grey dress, which he remembered to have seen and liked on the ship. How sweet, how dear she was, with her soft, bright eyes, and long curled eyelashes!

Involuntarily he put out his hand, but she seemed not to see the gesture, and the hand dropped.

"I used the name. I—thought it was better," he explained, trying to keep his head.

"Yes. No doubt it was better," she answered.

"And it really *is* my name," he went on. "One of my names."

"You have so many?"

"My sponsors in baptism—"

"The newspapers accused you of being your own sponsor."

"The newspapers accused me—what do you mean?"

"Surely you know. I told you I should read about you, but I expected to read very different things. However, we won't talk of that now—"

"But we must." For a moment he was the old, masterful Loveland. "We must. I want to know what you mean."

"That can wait awhile. I came to ask what *you* mean. Though I did read the newspapers, I was surprised to find you here. I'm acting for my friend, Sidney Cremer. A cousin of Sidney's and mine, who lives a few miles out of Ashville, saw 'Lord Bob' advertised for performance, and telegraphed. Sidney couldn't come, but my aunt brought me tonight, as Sidney Cremer's interests and mine are rather closely allied. And you know, nobody has a right to produce the play without the author's permission."

"Yes, I know," answered Loveland dejectedly. But his depression arose, not so much from the consciousness of wrongdoing, as from the suspicion engendered by the girl's tone in speaking of Sidney Cremer. Cremer's interests and hers were "closely allied"! She had blushed and even faltered a little, as she made the statement, and Val sprang instantly to the conclusion that she

was engaged to marry Cremer.

It had never occurred to him, when they played at platonic friendship on board the *Mauretania*, that Lesley Dearmer might be engaged. She had never said in so many words that she was not, but she hadn't at all the manner of a girl who had disposed of her future. In any case, however, whether the affair were new or of old standing, Loveland felt miserably certain that she was engaged now. And he stood convicted of defrauding the man whom she intended to marry. Was there any depth of wretchedness or of humiliation which the thirteenth Marquis of Loveland had not plumbed at last?

"You admit that you knew, and yet you produced and played in the piece?"

"I did. But——" he hesitated. Should he attempt to excuse himself, to disclaim responsibility, or would that only seem cowardly in her eyes?

"But—what? You see, I'm bound to report to my friend."

"Your friend!" broke out Loveland, losing his head. "You are going to marry him!"

"Sidney Cremer?"

"Yes. You don't deny it."

She laughed gently. "Why should I deny it—to you? Have you any right to question me, or bring me to book—about anything, Mr. Gordon?"

"I know I have no right," he admitted. "Forgive me." He guessed that her emphasis, and her frequent repetition of the name "Gordon" meant that she wished him to understand the change in their relationship. To her he was now only Gordon the actor, who had stolen Sidney Cremer's play. The past was to be forgotten.

"I must remind you again," Lesley went on, in a cool, businesslike manner, though her eyes were starry, "that I have come twenty miles to question you. And my aunt is waiting for you with the cousins who telegraphed about 'Lord Bob.' You know, you mustn't go on using Sidney Cremer's play."

"We have no intention of doing so," said Loveland. And then, in as few words as possible, without any attempt at defending himself for his part in the transaction, he explained baldly that the manager had deserted the company, and that they had only one piece, "Lord Bob." They had produced it for three nights, in the hope of making money enough to get away, but the result had proved disappointing.

"My affairs are rather in a muddle just now," Loveland finished; "but as soon as I get them straightened out again, which I expect to do shortly, I will myself pay Mr. Cremer's fee for these performances, if you'll let me know what they are."

"Oh, Sidney wouldn't want you to do that," the girl explained. "I—neither of us knew that the company was in trouble. My cousins here didn't tell us that—I suppose they didn't know, either. We thought it was simply an ordinary case of piracy. But I can answer for Sidney, as if it were for myself. He wouldn't want fees, and he wouldn't take any severe measures in such a case as this. If only you give me your word, Lord Lo—, I mean, Mr. Gordon, that these people won't go about the country playing this piece, I'll ask nothing more."

"You may set Mr. Cremer's mind at rest about that," Loveland answered bitterly. "They aren't likely to go about the country playing any piece."

"You mean, they—you—are stranded here?" enquired Lesley.

"Oh, I'm all right," Loveland said hurriedly, far from wishing to pose as an object of pity. "It's the others I'm thinking of."

She gave him a quick, clear look. "Would you go away and leave them here, in trouble?" she asked.

"No, I won't do that," replied Val. "I mean to do something for them."

"What can you do, if your affairs are in such a muddle as you say?"

"I don't know yet. I'm trying hard to think."

"Won't there be money enough from these three performances of 'Lord Bob' to pay their railway fares somewhere?"

"I'm afraid not. Hardly enough to settle with the landlord and get him to release their luggage, which he's keeping till last week's board bills are paid."

"Your luggage, too?"

Loveland grew red. "I haven't any."

"Oh!" the colour flew to her cheeks, as if in sympathy with the flush she could not help seeing on his. "No trunks?"

"You say you read the newspapers," said Loveland. "If you did, you perhaps saw that the hotel

people in New York treated me rather curiously. I didn't read the stuff myself. I really couldn't bring myself to do it. But I gathered from hints given me here and there that the journalists had a pretty rough game with me."

"You had a game with them, to begin with," said Lesley.

"I shut my door in the face of one, on my first day in New York," Loveland admitted. "Next day I hadn't a door to shut. America hasn't been very hospitable to me."

"What could you expect?" asked Lesley, defending her countrymen. Her face was grave, but there was an odd sparkle in her eyes. "Americans don't like having tricks played on them."

"I played no trick."

"You played a part—the part of Lord Loveland."

Val stared. "How can a man play that he's himself?"

"Do you deny the newspaper accusations, then?"

"What accusations? I did knock a man down in the street, and he gave his own version of the story."

"Oh, I don't mean that story, but quite another. The story he said you knocked him down for alluding to—when——"

"We're talking at cross purposes," broke in Loveland, bewildered. "For the sake of any friendship you may ever have had for me—though I'm not asking you to continue it in future—explain what you mean."

"But, do *you* mean that you read nothing, heard nothing, of what they were saying about you in New York?"

"I told you I wouldn't look at the papers. What I heard I of course took for granted was in connection with the hotel affair and the row in the street."

Lesley thought for a minute, with an expression on her face which Loveland could not understand, though he did not take his eyes from her fallen lashes, the beautiful lashes which had fascinated him at first sight of her on the *Mauretania*.

Presently an idea seemed to commend itself to the girl. On her arm, a little gold and platinum bag hung from its chain. Loveland had often seen this bag, on shipboard, and had even frequently picked it up from the floor, where the girl dropped it half a dozen times each day, when she slipped out from under the rugs of her deck chair. Well did he know the two compartments in this favourite little receptacle of Lesley's treasures! He knew in which one she kept the handkerchief which smelt like fresh violets; in which her money, her cardcase, her stylographic pen, and a letter or two; and now he watched her, with eyes homesick for past days, as she took out the remembered cardcase, and from an inner pocket of that cardcase, a folded newspaper cutting.

"It's quite time you did read for yourself," she said. "This will make you understand better than I can tell you. Fanny Milton cut it out of 'New York Light,' and posted it to me. I've kept it here—I hardly know why, but now I'm glad I did."

It was Tony Kidd's first article that Loveland read with a shock of surprise, which, at the very beginning, set the blood humming in his ears like the sound of the sea in a shell.

Tony had told his story spicily, in a way to make his readers laugh. But Loveland did not laugh. He read on and on, dazed at first, then with a burst of enlightenment which made clear many mysteries.

"The Difficult Young Man to Approach" had come to New York to see Heiresses and conquer Papas, said Tony. He had begun the conquering process on board ship, being a youth of a thrifty turn of mind, who believed in taking time by the forelock. He had made friends; he had even, perhaps, made love. Soon, no doubt, he would have made a match; but the schemes of mice, men, and even marquises have a way of going wrong, especially when—and that "when" reminded Tony to pause and ask a conundrum. "When is a Marquis not a Marquis?" The writer invited the public to guess. "Why, when he's a Valet, of course." And then Tony went on to protest gaily, that neither he nor his paper was responsible for the assertion that this Marquis was not a Marquis. They merely put the question, and gave the answer for what it was worth, on the strength of certain sensational news just received from the land where Marquises grew on blackberry bushes for heiresses to cull.

A number of people prominent in New York society had received cablegrams from London, informing them that the valet of the Marquis of Loveland had absconded with his lordship's jewellery, and other belongings; that the fugitive was known to have impersonated his master in London, obtaining goods from tradesmen, and running up bills at hotels, in Lord Loveland's name. If a person calling himself the Marquis of Loveland should appear in New York presenting letters of introduction to the said Prominent People earlier than the arrival of the White Star Liner *Baltic*, they were to beware of him, as the real Lord Loveland expected to sail on that ship.

On the very day when these cablegrams were received—Tony Kidd went on to state—there arrived by a strange (?) coincidence an attractive looking and haughty young gentleman, known

among acquaintances collected on the *Mauretania* as Lord Loveland. This alleged nobleman had gone to the Waldorf-Astoria, where, through a servant of the hotel, it was soon discovered that his pretentious trunks were practically empty. He had (perhaps naturally) refused to be interviewed by a representative of "Light"; and the manner of his refusal was somewhat graphically described.

Act 2 was a round of calls with letters of introduction to all the Prominent People warned by a friend (also prominent) in England.

Act 3: A scene in the Waldorf Restaurant, where some shipboard acquaintances, dining with one of the Prominent People, had heard from him of the cablegram, and of course refused to acknowledge acquaintance with the attractive nobleman when he appeared in the room, ready to greet the whole party with effusion.

Act 4: The Hotel authorities being informed, request "Lord Loveland" to find other accommodation.

Act 5: The husband and father of the two ladies, whom "Lord Loveland" met on the *Mauretania*, attacked and knocked down in the street, by the "Difficult Young Man to Approach."

Now, at last, Loveland understood everything that had happened to him in New York, even to the mystery of the bank. Again he seemed to see Cadwallader Hunter bending to talk with the good-looking, dark young man who had dined with the Coolidges. Mr. van Cotter had doubtless been one of those who had received the warning cablegrams, and naturally he had passed on the interesting news to the Coolidges and Miltons. Cadwallader Hunter, who had stopped to chat with the party, had been just in time to glean the information, and had taken revenge for the Englishman's rudeness of the morning by advising the hotel people to get rid of an undesirable client.

Oh, yes, it was easy enough to see it all now, even the reason why his mother and the London bankers had failed to answer his appeals for money. They had thought that Foxham was cabling, and had accordingly refused to be taken in. Apparently Foxham had absconded—somewhere—and his misdoings had been discovered on the other side before his late master had found him out. Perhaps Foxham had taken the ticket for the *Baltic* which he—Val—had instructed him to sell, and used it for himself, booking as a passenger for America in the name of Lord Loveland.

In that case the fellow had doubtless arrived in New York by this time, on the *Baltic*—the ship on which his master had originally intended to sail; and Heaven alone knew what new mischief he might have been working on this side of the water.

The thought of what might have happened was almost as infuriating as the knowledge of what certainly had happened. It all came from accepting the chance offered by Jim Harborough to sail on the *Mauretania*; but in spite of everything he had suffered, Loveland told himself that he would not have it different. If he had come over on the *Baltic* he would probably by this time be engaged to some American heiress, and would never have met Lesley Dearmer.

Just now, his acquaintance with her, combined with all the other extraordinary results of his sailing on the *Mauretania*, was putting him to the torture; and he was gloomily convinced that nothing would ever make things come right; nevertheless, he was dimly, subconsciously aware even in this bitter moment that he wouldn't choose release from torture at the price of not knowing the girl.

"All this is a surprise to you, then?" her voice broke into the midst of his reflections over the newspaper cutting.

"Completely."

"How very odd that you didn't read the papers," exclaimed Lesley.

"I was so disgusted with the way New York was treating me that I wasn't very keen to see what it was saying of me. Besides, as I told you, I thought I *did* know. I supposed it was all about the hotel fuss, and my knocking down that man Milton."

"Why *did* you knock him down?"

"I slapped him in the face, and he fell down."

"But why did you slap him in the face?"

"I can't tell you that, Miss Dearmer."

"Well," said Lesley, looking at him always from under her lashes to see how he was taking her words, "you've been dreadfully punished, at all events."

"I don't think I deserved punishment for that."

"Don't you? Of course I don't know anything about *that*, but you used to be—well, rather arrogant."

"I'm not arrogant now." Loveland smiled faintly. "I'm almost inclined to think I never shall be again."

"If you're not really Lord Loveland——"

"Not really——" He almost gasped, as he would have repeated her words. It had not occurred to him, even while he read the cutting, that Lesley Dearmer could possibly think him a fraud. "What—you—you—don't believe in me?" he stammered. "*You?*"

Apparently she was untouched by the reproach, the actual consternation in his voice.

"Why should *I* believe, more than anyone else?" she asked with a little dainty, sidewise turn of her head. "I was only a ship acquaintance, you know—like the others."

"Like the others who threw me over," he said.

"Yes, like the others. There was no difference—was there?" she challenged him.

But Loveland was in no mood to take up the gauntlet, if it were a gauntlet that she threw down.

"I suppose not," he answered from the depths.

"You valued almost all your other acquaintances on board more than you did me," the girl went on. "You were quite frank about that. By your own admission, you were a bit of an adventurer, coming over to my country to see what you could devour. I used to hate that in you—all the more because I thought you a *titled* adventurer. There was less excuse for a well brought up man, with every advantage of birth and education, than for——"

"Say it, Miss Dearmer. Say what you really think of me."

"I don't say I do think it. I say only, why should *I* believe in you, when other people don't?"

"I see now, there's *no* reason. And I'm not going to ask you to believe."

"You're not going to assure me that you are the real Lord Loveland?"

"No, I'm not. I'm not going to assert myself, or defend myself in any way—to you. I want you to draw your own conclusions."

"Very well," said Lesley, with sparkling eyes. "I do draw them."

"May I ask what they are?"

"You may ask, but I'm not going to answer your question just now. There are other questions to attend to, which we've dropped for this subject. About 'Lord Bob,' for instance."

"I've no excuse to offer, even for stealing your friend's play, except that—we were hard up, and we saw nothing else to do."

"Your people in England, if——"

"I've had no answer to my cablegrams. There's no time for answers to have come to letters, yet."

"I see. Meanwhile?——"

"Meanwhile, we're on our beam ends."

"You say 'we.' You identify yourself with these people—these poor little stranded actors?"

"Oh, yes, I'm one of them. A poor little stranded actor, too."

"You're not going to desert them?"

"No. We'll sink or swim together. You see, I've got rather fond of two of the 'poor little stranded actors'—my companions in misery; Ed Binney, who's very ill, really, and oughtn't to be acting—a good fellow, if ever there was one; and Miss de Lisle, the star——"

Lesley's face changed slightly, and her lips opened, but she did not speak.

"Who will perhaps some day marry a great friend of mine in New York."

"Oh! So you have a friend in New York?"

"Yes, one. He paints menus in the Twelfth Street Restaurant where I was a waiter."

"How you have changed!" exclaimed Lesley. "But perhaps it's only circumstances?"

"Perhaps," said Loveland.

"If I knew a way in which you could help your actor friends to escape from here and go—wherever they want to go, would you take it, I wonder?" asked the girl.

"I don't wonder. I'm sure," Loveland answered, thinking of poor little Lillie, "Bill's gal," and Ed Binney.

"It's a way that would be very 'infra dig,'" Lesley hesitated.

Loveland laughed. "What is 'infra dig'? I've forgotten."

"Oh, if you have, I'll tell you the way at once, and perhaps that will bring it back to your memory. Would you care to take a position in somebody's house as—as—well, a paid position with an advance on your salary, by which you could send all your friends happily away?"

"I'd do it like a shot—if anyone would have me," Loveland said quickly.

"Someone *will* have you—shall we say, as secretary? Do you know typewriting or shorthand?"

Loveland reluctantly answered that he did not.

"Dear me! The secretaryship won't answer then, I'm afraid. Are you anything of a linguist?"

"Can't speak a word of any language but my own—except a hotch potch of French. The little Latin I ever had is practically gone."

"What a pity! Are you good at mathematics?"

"I generally add up on my fingers. Never could remember the multiplication table."

"History, then? Could you help a friend of mine who's writing a novel on the fifteenth century?"

"All I know about the fifteenth century, that I can think of at this moment, is that it wasn't the fourteenth—or the sixteenth. Oh, I'm afraid I'm no good, after all, Miss Dearmer. You'll have to give me up as a bad job, and chuck me into gaol for the theft of Cremer's play. I've never had any proper education."

"Haven't you? I'm not so sure about that," said Lesley, with an inflection in her voice that Val couldn't quite understand. "And I'm not sure you haven't learnt your lesson rather well."

"Which one?" enquired Loveland, ruefully; but she could not have understood the question, for she went on talking as if it had not been asked.

"You must be able to do *something*," she said, her dimples well in control.

"You've seen that I can't act, but—well, I can shoot pretty straight."

"Ah, I don't know anyone who keeps a shooting gallery."

"And ride decently."

"Nor anyone who wants a riding master. Oh, but—now can you drive a motor-car?"

"Yes," said Loveland.

"Good. Do you understand the mechanism of cars?"

"Of two or three. As well as—or better than most chauffeurs, I think, if that isn't being conceited again."

"I'm not finding fault with you tonight for conceit. Would you take quite a temporary job as chauffeur, in—in a private family, with a sal—oh, I might as well say wages! of \$25 a week and your board and lodging besides?"

"If I could get the first week in advance, I might send everybody to Chicago—with what we've got out of the stolen play," Loveland said.

"Never mind the stolen play. In Sidney Cremer's name, I forgive you all, now I know the circumstances. No more to be said about that."

"You must know him very well indeed, to speak for him so positively," broke in Loveland, gloomily.

"I do," said Lesley. "You can have the first week's wages in advance, and the second, too. The car's a Gloria."

"My last was a Gloria."

"You mean—Lord Loveland's?"

"Oh, yes, I mean Lord Loveland's. Some men do make chauffeurs of their valets and vice versa. And you know, the real Loveland was hard up—or thought he was. I begin to see now, that he didn't know what being hard up meant."

"Even English peers can live and learn—while they're young, I suppose," said Lesley, meditatively. "But we were talking about you, weren't we? Do you accept the situation I offer you?"

"*You* offer?"

"Well, for my friend, Sidney Cremer. Sidney has just bought a new car, and sent it to us. I'm allowed to use it for awhile, as much as I like."

"He's coming, then?"

"We expect Sidney to be with us for some time—with my aunt and me."

"I'm hanged if I'll be his servant!" Val exclaimed, with something of his old vehemence.

"Oh! Very well, Mr. Gordon. I thought you were really in earnest, or I wouldn't have made the suggestion."

"So I am. But——"

"There's often a '*but*' in such cases, isn't there? I admit it wouldn't be a particularly agreeable position for a man who has——er——"

"Posed as a peer," Loveland finished for her, bitterly.

"You put the words into my mouth. I was going to say—you seemed so anxious to do something to help the others, and this is the only thing I can think of by which you could make money quickly and——"

Ed Binney's pale face and Lillie's wistful eyes seemed to float in the air before the unhappy Loveland. "Very well," he said, "I will be Mr. Cremer's chauffeur. I've taken his play. I'll take his money; I'll take his food; I'll live under his roof, and I'll serve him as well as I can. And I'll only ask you to believe one decent thing of me, Miss Dearmer: that it isn't for my own sake."

"It will be my food you eat," said Lesley, sweetly. "And my roof which will give you shelter."

Loveland drew in his breath hard, as they looked at each other. Yes, it would be her roof, and her food. That was the worse for him, because it made it more and more plain that Sidney Cremer must be very near and dear to her.

"It's quite settled, then?" she asked pleasantly.

"It's quite settled," he echoed. "For a fortnight."

There were no dimples at play in Lesley's cheeks; but one might almost have said that her eyes laughed.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

A PROTÉGÉ OF MISS DEARMER'S

Lesley Dearmer and her aunt were staying that night at Ashville with their friends, and next morning everything was arranged. Loveland explained that, in a fortnight, at latest, he would certainly be released from the bondage of his embarrassments, therefore he would take service as Mr. Cremer's chauffeur only for that length of time, thus giving his employers a chance to find a good man for a permanent engagement. He received from Lesley the two weeks' wages in advance, and the fifty dollars—a far larger amount than he had touched since landing—seemed to him a respectable sum. Ten dollars he kept for his own necessities, and the rest he divided among the members of the broken company.

The profits from the three performances of "Lord Bob" paid the hotel bills for all, and left a few dollars over. Lumped together, there was enough to take Lillie de Lisle, Ed Binney, Miss St. Clare, and the Winters to Chicago, leaving something to tide each one through a week or two of idleness.

Lillie, Ed, and Miss St. Clare could hardly express their gratitude to Loveland, and the words they said to him warmed his heart as it had never been warmed before. There was a queer kind of happiness in sacrificing himself for others that came as an absolutely new sensation to Val. He wondered at it, feeling the glow of it, and was dimly conscious that the hardships he endured had unexpected compensations.

As for Pa and Ma Winter, they were less openly grateful, seeming to take what was done for them more or less as a right; and they would assuredly have protested vigorously had Loveland favoured his friends, Miss de Lisle and Ed Binney, beyond what they—the Winters—had received. Their attitude, however, mattered little to Val. They were old and unfortunate, and he was sorry for them, as he was learning to be sorry for those upon whom the world was hard: besides, Lillie and Ed, and perhaps Miss St. Clare, would have refused to accept anything beyond what the Winters shared; and both assured Val that one day, before long, they would repay him all.

Lillie was in touch with Bill again; therefore, in spite of the uncertain future, she was not unhappy. She had written to Bill the day after Loveland joined the company, had sent him a photograph of herself, and a collar for Shakespeare, the best that could be bought for fifty cents in Modunk. Bill had answered to Ashville, and though neither had any prospects, both had unlimited hope, now that they were sure of the love and loyalty which had outlived discouragements, absence, and unprosperous years. Lillie was going to Chicago, and Chicago might have something to offer. Bye and bye—who could tell?—she and Bill, "the best man she ever knew," might come together. Meanwhile, they could go on loving each other.

The girl went off buoyed up with hope; and Ed Binney had friends in Chicago. He would rest a little, and be "all right," he said to Val, shaking hands over and over again in the moment of goodbye.

To reach Lesley Dearmer's home it was necessary to travel for an hour in a slow local train which lingered lovingly at each tiny station by the way, and then to drive for six miles in a carriage. This last stage of the journey ended at the Hill Farm, as Mrs. Loveland's place was called; and the Hill Farm lay in charming country not far from Louisville.

Loveland was instructed to meet the two ladies at the train, and receive his railway ticket, having seen his friends off for Chicago; and at noon of the day after her surprise visit to the theatre, Miss Dearmer's newly appointed chauffeur was waiting for his employer at the Ashville station.

In his hand was the battered bag which had called forth the contempt of Jack Jacobus, and in his heart were shame, rebellion, jealousy, and joy, mingled with several other emotions, none of which he could have defined—least of all the joy.

He reminded himself that there could now be no possible satisfaction in his nearness to Lesley. She did not like him enough to believe in him. She had practically admitted that she accepted the estimate of strangers, and the circumstantial evidence which made him seem a fraud. She had not denied her engagement to Sidney Cremer, whose servant Loveland had pledged himself to be, and she even showed—or Val imagined it—a mischievous pleasure in the situation. She had not had the grace to say, "I know this is all horrid, and humiliating to you. I'm sorry, and will try to help you make the best of it."

Why should she say so, indeed, when she believed him to be no better than an adventurer, punished for a mean attempt at deceiving? Regarded from that point of view, he ought to be grateful to Miss Dearmer for trusting him far enough to take him on as a chauffeur. But he was not grateful. He thought that, on the contrary, he was very angry; yet he was not quite sure. And if he were angry, it was a strange kind of anger that he felt.

He had to wait for some time on the platform before Miss Dearmer appeared, and then she came towards him alone.

"Auntie is saying goodbye to our Ashville friends," she explained. "I—they're not going to stop with us till the train goes. I thought for several reasons it would be better not, and they quite understand. Before you meet my aunt, I want a little talk with you. I haven't told her, or the others, that you—that there's any connection between you and the newspaper story about—the Marquis and his adventures."

"Thank you. That was considerate," said Val, somewhat sarcastically. "What have you told Mrs. Loveland, then?"

"That's what I want to talk with you about. I said I'd met you before, and was sorry to find now that you'd had misfortunes, losing your money, and other things that had put you into an uncomfortable position. Auntie was in her stateroom on board ship till the last morning, and then I didn't point you out to her. If she saw you at all, she didn't notice you particularly, and besides she's very near sighted. If there'd been any danger of her recognising you, she would have done so at the theatre last night, when you were playing 'Lord Bob.' She knows only that you're Mr. Gordon, and that to help you a little, I've asked you to act as chauffeur for a short time, till you can get something better."

"And till Mr. Cremer can get someone better," Loveland capped her words.

"You have to be tried first," smiled the girl, "before we can tell whether you're good, better—or best. Meanwhile Aunt Barbara's just trusting me. She always does, for she's used to what she calls my funny ways, and she's found out that there's some sense in them. My experiments generally turn out successes."

"Then I'm to consider myself one of your experiments?"

"Decidedly," laughed Lesley. "And I mean you to be a success—a great success. Now I'm going to Auntie. I think we'd better travel in different cars, for she hasn't quite got used yet to the idea of a gentleman chauffeur. I've told her that they're the fashion, and she's prepared to take you on faith. But the first time she travels in your company you had better be in the motor."

With that, the girl pressed a railway ticket into his hand, and he was left not knowing whether he were more inclined to laughter or to cursing. But the train came at this moment, and he had no time to analyse his mood.

At Louisville a carriage was waiting for Mrs. Loveland and Miss Dearmer. It was a brougham, and there was room in it only for themselves and their handbags. The chauffeur was told off to a hired vehicle, for which his employers would pay.

Once outside the suburbs of the big town, the country was pretty, and reminded Val so strongly of England that it brought on an attack of homesickness.

The Hill Farm might almost have been an English farm, with its rambling, red-brick house, apparently of the Georgian period, its square-paned windows and its pillared porch draped with a tangle of grapevine and Virginia creeper. Val had seen farm-houses at home, converted by the younger sons of gentlemen into pleasant if modest mansions; and the gracious elms, the sturdy old oaks and generous apple trees might all have been transplanted from an English landscape.

Val arrived only a few minutes later than Lesley and Mrs. Loveland; and the girl was waiting for him in the open door-way when his hack drove up.

"This is a big, old house," said Lesley, coming out into the porch—"at least, it's old for America. It's stood for about a hundred and fifty years, and there's lots of room in it. You will live in the west wing. In a few minutes Uncle Wally will show you where to go. Already we've given directions to have your quarters got ready, but while the servants are busy there you may as well come out with me, and have a look at—at—Sidney's new car. I hope you'll like it. Here, Uncle Wally, take Mr. Gordon's bag."

This order was a surprise to Loveland. He had supposed that the "Uncle Wally," who was presently to be his guide, would turn out to be a relative of Miss Dearmer's, perhaps the master of the house; but it was a very ancient and very black darkey, dressed in a sombre old-fashioned livery, who came forward, all white grin and low bows.

The knucky black hand relieved Loveland of the shabby bag, but there was no contempt either for the bag or its owner on the mild old face of the grey-headed negro, who was as perfect and well trained a servant in his way as any butler in an English country house. Evidently he, too, had been told that this was a "gentleman chauffeur," to be treated like a gentleman; and Loveland was grateful to his hostess, feeling a sudden impulse towards happiness, until with a shock, he remembered Sidney Cremer.

"When will Mr. Cremer arrive?" he asked Lesley, as they walked together across a sloping lawn, towards the stables.

"Oh, Sidney's very much at home here," she answered lightly, "you may see him at any time. Meanwhile, you won't mind driving the car for me, will you?"

"I think you know whether I'll mind that or not," said Loveland, almost more to himself than to the girl. "If only there were no Sidney Cremer—"

"I have an idea you won't dislike Sidney when you meet him," Lesley said, kindly.

"A man's chauffeur has no right to an opinion about him—at least, that's what I used to think myself," said Val.

"And now—and now are your ideas changing? Do you begin to feel just a tiny bit, that 'rank's but the guinea stamp,' and 'a man's a man for a' that'? For if you do, after all it won't have done you any harm to come to America," said Lesley.

"It's riches here, not rank, which counts apparently," Loveland retorted. "And that's just as bad."

"Riches don't count with me," said Lesley.

"Cremer must be very rich," grumbled Loveland, apparently apropos of nothing.

"Sidney makes a good deal of money out of novels and plays—at least, it seems a good deal to me, but maybe it wouldn't to you. Perhaps Sidney's earnings amount to about twelve or fifteen thousand of your English pounds a year—and he's saved quite a lot, too, for he's been popular as a playwright and novelist in America and England for several years now."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Loveland. "What a lucky beggar!"

"That just expresses it—a 'lucky beggar'—for he was almost a beggar at the time he made his first success. He was dependent on his relations when a child, for his father and mother died when he was a baby, leaving him not a penny, and he was brought up with the idea of being a school teacher, which he would have hated."

"Success like that often spoils people," said Val, frankly ungracious in his jealousy.

"I don't think it's spoiled Sidney," replied the girl. "He has heaps of faults, but I shouldn't call him conceited or vain."

"Shall you be married soon?"

Lesley smiled, and her dimples twinkled. "It isn't decided yet. But I daresay it will be soon. Now, I suppose with the grand ideas you used to talk to me about, twelve or fifteen thousand pounds a year, and a few loose thousands lying around would seem like shabby genteel poverty to you."

"Don't hit a man when he's down," said Loveland. "If I had only half as much as Mr. Cremer, I could do the things I want most to do."

"What are they?" asked Lesley. For it was still some distance to the stable which was also, for the present, garage as well, and she walked slowly on the moist grass, picking her way, step by step, with leisurely daintiness.

"Nowadays, the things I feel I should like most to do are to restore our poor old tumbled-down home, and get rid of my debts."

"You say 'nowadays.' Have you changed your mind lately?"

"I've changed almost everything—except these everlasting tweeds! I know, of course, that my affairs will come right in *one* way, presently. I shall get back to England before my leave's up: but I shan't go back the same man. The things that pleased me most before, won't be the things to please me most in future. I feel that, somehow."

"Things will come right only in *one* way, for you?" she echoed.

"Only in one way. I've lost the chance of all that's the best worth having—if I ever could have had such a chance."

"You're too young to give up hope. Almost as young as Sidney Cremer."

"What?—he's younger than I am?"

"Sidney is twenty-three."

"And has been a successful novelist and playwright for three years? He's a sort of infant phenomenon."

"Think of Pitt," Lesley reminded him, smiling.

"Once you said you didn't like men under twenty-six—they seemed so raw."

"I ought to be flattered that you should remember my sayings of 'once.' You see, though, Sidney's quite different from—other men, especially to me. But here we are at the stables. We'll talk about Sidney's car, instead of Sidney."

"Just one question first!" exclaimed Loveland, stopping short in front of the old-fashioned but neatly kept stables, and spacious Southern barn. "I know I haven't any right to ask it, but—were you engaged to Cremer when we crossed together on the *Mauretania*?"

"My relations with Sidney were then exactly what they are now," replied the girl, with a pretty primness that made her mouth look as if she had just said, "prunes, prisms, propriety."

His last hope gone—since Lesley had not accepted Cremer out of pique—Loveland was silenced.

A darkey groom, who came forward grinning, opened the doors of an inverted loose-box, and showed a fine black and scarlet motor-car, glittering with varnish, brass, and newness.

Deeply interested, or feigning interest, Lesley made Loveland lift the shining bonnet and explain detail after detail of the mechanism.

"It sounds fascinating!" she said at last. "The monster only arrived three days ago, though it—or ought I to say 'she'?—was on order months and months ago. Two or three chauffeurs have come in from Louisville to be interviewed (you see, Sidney trusts my judgment just as Auntie does!) but I wasn't satisfied with them."

"Perhaps you won't be satisfied with me?" suggested Val.

"Oh, you're only a temporary chauffeur," she answered. And though it was rather cruel to remind the lonely young man in a strange land how soon he was to lose his only friend, the girl smiled as she spoke. "I must just put up with you as you are. You've quite impressed me with what you know about the machine part. I daresay you can drive. Your manner and appearance are *quite* nice; and besides——"

"Besides—what?" Val almost snapped at her.

"It seems as if it was *meant* to be, as Uncle Wally says when he breaks a dish. And I'm wondering whether I shall be brave enough to let you teach me to drive. Sidney will want me to know how, I'm sure."

Loveland suddenly felt a wild longing to kill Sidney Cremer, the successful novelist-playwright, and to smash Sidney Cremer's beautiful new car.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

SIDNEY CREMER'S CHAUFFEUR

No letter was forwarded to the Hill Farm from the theatre at Bonnerstown, for the very good reason that Miss Moon, having found one for Mr. P. Gordon, opened, read, and out of sheer spite, destroyed it with its several enclosures.

The envelope was addressed in Bill Willing's inappropriately beautiful handwriting, and there was a short note from him, saying that he had great pleasure in enclosing two letters just arrived from England; also that he sent his "undying love to Lillie de Lisle."

One of the English letters blazed to the actress's dazzled eyes with a gilded coronet, and began, "My own darling Val, how can you ever forgive me for not answering your poor, dear cablegram, but of course I thought it was from that horrible wretch Foxham. It seems now, he *sold* your ticket for the *Baltic*, and sailed for Australia. All sorts of reports came in about him directly after you must have sailed, and I learn now that even before you left, James Harborough suspected him, because of some forged cheque he'd heard of—I'm really too confused and upset to remember how or when or what. But in any case it was *most* remiss of James not to have instantly warned you against the man, even on the slightest suspicion."

This was only the beginning of the coroneted letter, which had no paragraphs and very few punctuations. Jealous still, Miss Moon was relieved to see that the signature was "Your adoring mother," but she was at a loss to understand allusions to duchesses and other persons of title. Indeed, it would have appeared to her like a "property" letter to be read on the stage by an aristocratic hero of melodrama, had it not been for the post office order for three hundred dollars, which it contained. It was a genuine order, as Miss Moon might have been inclined to prove for herself, if she had had any hope of obtaining the money, which she had not; therefore the next best thing was to throw the document into the fire, that Gordon might not benefit by it.

The other letter enclosed had no coronet, not even a crest; but the paper was very nice, smelled faintly of spring flowers, and had for an address a number in Park Lane, which Miss Moon had read of in English novels as a street mostly inhabited by elderly millionaire villains who persecuted poor, but beautiful heroines. The writing was pretty, and the letter was signed "Your affectionate cousin, Betty." At the end was a postscript in a different hand, which seemed somehow to suit the rather dashing signature—"Jim."

This second letter was even more difficult than the first for an uninitiated person to understand, and it irritated Miss Moon to a high pitch of nervousness.

"Cousin Betty" seemed to be explaining and justifying a thing that "Jim" had done.

"It was partly a joke, and partly earnest, but it had a good motive," wrote Betty. "I guessed, the morning your really very conceited letter about the New York introductions came, that Jim had something quaint up his sleeve, to spring upon you when you'd arrived in America, but I didn't know what. To tell the truth, Val, I was even more disgusted than Jim, by your cool way of assuming that you had only to show yourself on the other side, to pick and choose among all the nicest as well as richest girls. I should have *loved* to box your ears, and I said 'Of course we won't give him any letters, and I'll tell him just what we think of him. Then maybe he won't go.' But Jim said 'Yes, we *will* give him the letters, and he shall go. We may find another way of teaching him a lesson, a way that will do him good if he's worth being done good to.'

"That was all, and as Jim didn't refer to the subject again after we posted the letters of introduction, the conversation slipped my mind. I didn't think any more about it until weird things began to be copied into London papers from New York ones, and your mother wired Jim to ask what, if anything, could be done to punish Foxham. You see, she thought you were on the *Baltic*.

"Jim soothed all her worries, so you needn't be anxious about her, as of course you would if you thought she'd been alarmed. When I saw paragraphs in the papers I talked to Jim, and it was only then that he told me what he'd done; how it was all his fault really, and he was very sorry, because everything had turned out a lot worse for you than he'd ever dreamed of wanting it to be. 'Fate took a hand in the game, and played it for all it was worth,' Jim said.

"It seems that Foxham, your man, asked Jim to cash a cheque signed by you, one night not long ago (don't you remember when he and I were at Battlemead, and you came down for Saturday to Monday?). Jim suspected something wrong, but wouldn't speak to you till he'd made sure, because that wouldn't have been fair, and Foxham was such an invaluable valet. A few days later, when Jim was making enquiries about the man, he found out that the horrid creature had actually impersonated you at two or three hotels, and run up bills in your name. It was the very evening before your letter about America came that Jim got the first part of this information, and day by day more kept coming in, up to the time when we heard Foxham had given you notice. All along Jim was thinking out the idea of that lesson for you—the joke that was to be half in earnest—and then, when Mr. VanderPot couldn't sail in the *Mauretania*, the whole plan was mapped out, without a word being said, even to me.

"Of course, I want to assure you again (and Jim will write a postscript) that he meant nothing worse to happen to you than a disappointment, and a blow to your conceit. He telegraphed to several of the people to whom you had letters, saying that if a person turned up calling himself by your name, *before* the *Baltic* landed, they'd better wait and make sure before being nice to you, that *you weren't your own absconding valet sailing under false colours*. He didn't say it *wouldn't* be you, and he supposed that his friends would simply hang back for a few days, making no sign, thus giving you to think that you weren't as important in America as you'd fancied. He imagined, too, that the *heiress* business wouldn't come off *quite* as easily as you expected, and that altogether you might be a little sobered down. As for your trouble with the bank, we know now, that *this* is what happened: It turns out that Henry van Cotter has lately become a partner in the bank which corresponds with yours in London, and having got Jim's wire about the valet (probably at the same time when instructions arrived from the London and Southern), naturally he told his people to be prepared, and not to pay. How could Jim think of such a thing happening—or that Mr. van Cotter and the others would run about gossiping of what he told them as a mere *supposition*? It must have been too dreadful for you at the hotel!—and as for that Mr. Milton, I'm sure he is a *horror*.

"Then, it was another *contretemps* that neither Jim nor I saw the newspapers at first. We'd gone off on a motor trip, as the weather was lovely, and were darting all about Cornwall and Wales, starting so early every morning, and not arriving at hotels till so late at night, that we didn't bother with the papers for nearly a week. Of course the minute Jim knew what had been going on, he wired everywhere, and wrote long letters of explanation, too (a little earlier than he'd originally meant), to put an end to the misunderstanding he'd set in motion. But meanwhile you'd disappeared from New York. Poor dear, my heart quite bleeds for you! And yet—and yet—I

wonder if all that you've gone through is *entirely* a matter for regret?"

It was here, after the "Affectionate Cousin Betty" signature, that the other handwriting began.

"I wonder, too? I want to know what you think about it. Now it's all explained, and you see just where and how much I'm to blame for what's past, you may or may not be inclined to forgive me for trying to play Providence, that good might come of evil. But if there are any things which you don't regret, perhaps you'll partly understand—yourself and me. Anyhow, I apologise, having now done my best to atone, in case you want to go back to New York in a blaze of glory and be made a lion of. Meanwhile, I await your verdict, and am—as the writers of anonymous letters are supposed to sign themselves—'your friend and well-wisher,' Jim."

Again Fate had "taken a hand in the game," and used Miss Moon as catspaw. Into the fire in her bedroom at Bonnerstown went all those elaborate explanations; and Loveland did not dream that he had only to communicate with the bank in New York to receive apologies and a sum of money which, after his vicissitudes, would have seemed a fortune. He had not even a prophetic "pricking in his thumbs" while his mother's post office order for three hundred dollars—sixty pounds—gaily burned in a Bonnerstown stove. He had no suspicion that New York Society—or an important section of it—was wearing sackcloth and ashes on his account. No instinct told him that even while the letters and money order were being reduced to ashes, Tony Kidd was concocting a glorious "story" about the Marquis of Loveland, which would ring through the country; neither did he know that Lesley Dearmer, whether believing him a genuine article or not, had sent him an anonymous donation which lay unclaimed at the Waldorf-Astoria.

Of all these things was he ignorant, and Lesley (sure that he had never received her offering) would have seen Sidney Cremer's forty horse-power Gloria burnt before her eyes rather than confess what she had done. Nevertheless, she was enjoying herself very much, and if Cremer's chauffeur went about with an unsmiling face it did not depress her spirits, unless for a minute at a time when she was particularly and foolishly soft-hearted. She knew that all the chauffeur's bodily wants were being well cared for at the Hill Farm. He had a comfortable bedroom and a little sitting-room attached, in the far corner of the west wing, which was the newest part of the old red brick house. She did not suggest his wearing the costume of a chauffeur, but sent him by Uncle Wally a fur-lined overcoat and motoring cap which she said, Sidney Cremer had ordered for the future driver of his car. Mr. Gordon's meals were served in his own small sitting-room, and he had plenty of books to read. Had it not been that Miss Dearmer wished to drive Cremer's automobile, Val would have seen little of her; but she took two lessons a day.

Her aunt, Mrs. Loveland, sat in the tonneau, dutifully, perhaps cheerfully, playing the part of chaperon, after Lesley had experimented a little, and become proficient enough not to be a public danger. But the girl sat in the driver's seat, with Mr. Cremer's temporary chauffeur beside her, and they could talk of what they chose (if they chose to talk at all) without being overheard by Aunt Barbara in the snug shelter of the Limousine.

Loveland wrote to the theatre at Bonnerstown, asking the manager to forward anything that might arrive; but days passed on, and nothing came. This was not strange, considering Miss Moon's bold treatment of Bill's fat envelope with its important contents. But it seemed strange to Loveland, who had allowed more than enough time for letters to his mother and Betty Harborough to be answered and forwarded.

Everything in his life of late was so extraordinary, however, that to find his expectations fulfilled in a commonplace way would have surprised him almost more than having them blighted.

Besides, his disappointment at not hearing from home was not as poignant as it had been. He had kept ten dollars for himself, out of his advance of salary, therefore he was not entirely penniless, and he had few, if any, expenses at the Hill Farm, where all his needs were as carefully considered as if he had been a member of the family.

Though Sidney Cremer's speedy arrival dangled over his head, like a sharp sword, which might fall at any moment and cut short the thread of his happiness, while it lasted the thread was of glistening gold.

He could not be sure whether Lesley Dearmer believed in him as Lord Loveland, or whether she really thought him a repentant impostor, whom she was befriending and trying to reform; but she was unvaryingly kind, and the subject of his true identity was not further discussed. He was too proud to allude to, and force it upon her, after the doubts which she had hinted, and she seemed to have no wish to bring it up. As to that sweet and kindly lady who was chaperon and aunt, she appeared to take Mr. Gordon trustfully for granted as an unfortunate but talented young gentleman rescued from a run of bad luck. She spoke to him pleasantly when necessary, asked polite questions now and then about the car, or his personal comfort in the house, but otherwise seemed to regard him with no very lively interest.

Lesley was everything to her. She adored Lesley, and whatever Lesley did or wished to do was perfect in her eyes. Therefore it was not odd that she should accept the transplanted actor as "one of Lesley's lucky finds."

In the house, he and Miss Dearmer had no intercourse, and he did not even know what the girl's daily occupations were, or what visitors she saw. But at least three hours out of every twenty-four gave her to him as an intimate companion, near in mind and body; therefore until the hateful Cremer should fall out of a clear sky, Val was not eager for home news which would leave no

excuse for lingering at this old homestead in the Blue Grass country.

Though he was a paid employé, the Hill Farm seemed to him the pleasantest place in which he had ever lived, not excepting any splendid and well ordered country mansion where he had been a flattered member of a house party.

Ways at the Hill Farm were simple ways, and there was no grandeur, no display in the quaint, rambling red brick house. All the servants were coloured, and were either elderly men and women who had served "the family" before the war which freed them from slavery, or else young, happy-go-lucky sons and daughters of the old servitors. There were a great many of them about the place, indoors and out, so many that Loveland could hardly tell one face from another, but they were all kindly, dark faces that brightened into glittering grins at sight of the English chauffeur.

Everything was done on a lavish, though far from pretentious, scale, but the ordering of the establishment might mean wealth, or might mean no more than a comfortable competence. The furniture was good, and in the best of taste, but it was almost all antique, brought from England by ancestors of Mrs. Loveland's or Lesley Dearmer's perhaps, in that good time when Chippendale and Sheraton treasures were regarded as ordinary possessions.

In the stables were a couple of beautiful hunters, Lesley's property, for Loveland soon discovered that a true daughter of Kentucky considers it a disgrace to the county for every girl not to be a fearless and accomplished rider. There were two fat old carriage horses, also, and other animals for the farm work which was carried on by a middle-aged married couple. Altogether it was clear that Mrs. Milton's and Cadwallader Hunter's estimate of the ladies' circumstances had been unjust. Mrs. Loveland and her niece were not "teachers taking a holiday while their money lasted." Perhaps the farm and the money were all Mrs. Loveland's; but Lesley had told Val on ship board that she earned enough for self-support by writing stories. Therefore she was not in any case entirely dependent upon her aunt, and it was evident that the girl and the elderly lady were very content in that state of life to which it had pleased God to call them.

It seemed to Val that Lesley was always happy; and because she was happy herself she could not bear to see others sad or unfortunate. Though she asked no questions about her chauffeur's English past, she showed frank interest in his American experiences. She led him on, as they spun through the country side by side, to talk of Bill Willing, of Lillie de Lisle, of Ed Binney, and even of Isidora, the almond-eyed. Of the fire at Alexander the Great's she had read in the papers, and she deigned a few words of praise for Loveland's behaviour. She was curious, also, to hear "what happened afterwards"; and though Val was silent as to Isidora's part in his next move, woman's wit supplied the missing link.

Too delicate-minded to put her suspicions into words, Lesley, nevertheless, contrived tactfully to pluck from Loveland some scanty information concerning Miss Alexander's semi-engagement to the Jewish commercial traveller.

"She'll never marry him," the girl announced authoritatively.

"I wish I could think you were right," said Loveland. "Poor Isidora has a warm, generous heart, and it would be a beastly shame to waste her on the oily creature. But Alexander's hard to beat, once he makes up his mind."

"When I first knew you, it wouldn't have occurred to you that the affairs of a common little person like that might be worth bothering about!" exclaimed Lesley. "But now I believe you're really interested."

"I really am," admitted Val. "I hope that doesn't disgust you?"

"Exactly the other way," Lesley assured him. "But you needn't be anxious. An only daughter, spoiled by her father, is just as 'hard to beat' as the most obstinate and tyrannical old parent. Isidora won't marry the Cohen man—after all that's happened. She won't marry anyone, for a good long time, but bye and bye she will, and then it will be somebody of her own choosing, not her father's."

"What makes you think so?" asked Loveland.

"Oh—because I'm a woman myself." And then she would say no more on that subject; but she talked eagerly of Bill Willing and his Star.

Sidney Cremer would play fairy godfather to the two, she said, speaking with that happy certainty of her lover's mind which invariably depressed and irritated Loveland.

There were numerous country companies "on the road," touring with Sidney's pieces in very good towns. Sidney would take "Mr. Gordon's" word for Lillie de Lisle's ability as a soubrette, and would offer her a part shortly to be open, owing to the marriage of the girl now playing it. As for "that perfect lamb of a Bill," a place should be found for him in the same company, that Lesley would promise. He could travel as a sort of handy man, to repaint and freshen up the scenery and as Sidney would doubtless guarantee the pair a permanent engagement together, they could marry at once on the strength of it.

"You had better wait and hear what Mr. Cremer says," suggested Loveland almost bitterly, when Lesley had instructed him to write the good news at once to Lillie and Bill. Ed Binney was also to

be provided for, sent to a convalescent home, and given hope for a chance as "property man" with one of Sidney's plays, when he should be strong enough to go on tour again.

"Oh, Sidney and I always think alike. Haven't I told you that before?" was Lesley's answer. "There's no need to wait. I know all about Sidney's business. And I thought it would be a pleasure to you to write, and be the means of making your friends happy."

"So it would, if I *were* the means," muttered Loveland. "But I'm not. It's Mr. Sidney Cremer. Everything is Sidney Cremer, and he is everything."

"Some day I may remind you of that speech," said Lesley. Then she laughed in a mysterious little way she had. But she was determined that Loveland should write the letters she desired written; and learning the lesson of unselfishness, he tried to rejoice sincerely in his friends' good luck.

"It's a long lane that has no turning," he said to himself as he sealed letters which would change the face of the world for three persons. "Their turning has come at last, and I'm glad. But my lane is blocked. Whatever happens, that brute Sidney Cremer will always stand at the end and bar my way out."

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

IN THE CAR TOGETHER

It was the day after Val had sent off the joyful tidings to his friends in the big world beyond the Hill Farm that tidings from the big world came to him.

Thanks to Miss Moon, the letters from home were lost; but greatly as that lady would have delighted in so sweeping a measure, it was impossible to keep P. Gordon for ever in the dark, by destroying whole issues of New York journals.

Uncle Wally was in the habit of bringing the gentleman chauffeur his breakfast, and with that meal—which consisted of delicious Southern dishes—the morning paper.

Loveland did not find American news particularly exciting, and, as a rule, merely glanced through the paper as he ate; but "New York Light" had a special interest for him. He associated it not only with his first American adventures, but with Tony Kidd, for whom he felt a queer, friendly sort of regard since their work together and their short chat afterwards at Alexander the Great's. If Val were to be "righted" in the eyes of New York, he had the idea that it would be through the pen of Tony Kidd, which had once blackened him with so scandalous a spatter of ink.

Miss Dearmer, or Mrs. Loveland, subscribed for the Sunday edition of "New York Light," and today was Monday. The paper had arrived: and as Loveland rose early to attend to the car (with far more alacrity than he had ever risen for guard mounting at home) it appeared that he was to have first chance at the news.

His eyes lighted with a certain interest as he saw the paper laid conspicuously on the breakfast tray; for this was his first Monday at the Hill Farm, and consequently his first sight of the New York Sunday paper.

"I suppose the ladies won't be wanting this for a few minutes yet?"

"No, sah, ole Miss nevah looks at de papahs till a'tah brekfus, and young Miss was writin' late las' night, so she won't be ringin' yet awhile, I reckon," said the grey-headed darkey who had been a slave when Mrs. Loveland was a child.

Val laid aside the Louisville Monday paper, and began to read "New York Light."

Suddenly he cried out an excited "By Jove!" and forgot that he had not finished his breakfast: but as by this time Uncle Wally had gone, there was nobody to be surprised by his emotion.

Yes, it had come at last—his justification, and even his triumph; for the story as told by Tony Kidd made it seem almost a triumph. Indeed, he had hardly realised himself how dramatic it all was, until he saw the printed account of what he had gone through. Bill Willing had been interviewed at the Bat Hotel, of which a graphic sketch and description were given. Alexander the Great had been interviewed, and thus secured another free advertisement for the red restaurant. Isidora had been interviewed, and photographed in her best hat. And last, though far from least, Mr. Henry van Cotter had been interviewed. From him, it seemed, Tony Kidd had got on the trail of the truth. Mr. van Cotter's friend, Jim Harborough, had wired from London that it was all a mistake about the valet impersonating the Marquis of Loveland, a mistake which had partly arisen through the sailing of Lord Loveland on the *Mauretania* instead of the *Baltic*, as expected. The valet had sailed for Australia, but would be arrested at the first port, and it was the Marquis of Loveland himself whom Fate and Society had hounded out of New York.

"Where is Lord Loveland?" was one of the several sensational headlines, with which Tony had ornamented his two-column article, for though Bill Willing had told of the barn-storming episode, he did not yet know, and therefore could not tell (even if he would) his "swell friend's" present address.

So great and even touching was Tony's eloquence, that tears had fallen from bright eyes for Loveland's sorrows, and the most tears from the brightest eyes were those shed by Fanny Milton. Never had she liked Tony half as well as on that Sunday morning when she read what Loveland read the following day. And as Tony had shrewdly guessed at her feelings, he thought that he could not make a wiser move than to call at Mrs. Milton's house on Sunday evening. Mrs. Milton was out, but Fanny was at home; and such was her gratitude to the journalist for his championship of her hero, that before Tony left her he had won more than half the promise he wanted.

Loveland, however, was not thinking of Fanny Milton, but of Lesley Dearmer.

Now that he had come into his own again, he could no doubt somehow get money almost at once, on that unlucky letter of credit, pay back the advance Miss Dearmer had made him, cease to be a gentleman chauffeur, leave the Hill Farm, and return to New York to be a gentleman at large.

But there was no joy in the thought of ceasing to be a chauffeur, and still less in that of leaving the Hill Farm.

The play was played out, and the adventure was over, but life could not be as it had been for Loveland. He could not take up the old life or the old self where he had dropped both, one night in Central Park. He was a different man in these days, caring for different things; and unfortunately the thing he cared for most was the one thing he could not have: Lesley Dearmer's love.

He had wanted it from the first, though not enough just at the first to try for it at the risk of great self-sacrifice. Now, he would have counted no sacrifice too great if it could give him that which once he had not known how to value worthily. Being once more Lord Loveland, and having a repentant New York at his feet, would not give him Lesley Dearmer.

By this time, his mother must have written, he thought, and Betty, too. Though the Bonnerstown secret was hidden from him, he believed letters had been sent. All ought soon to be right with him, in the best of possible worlds; but because there was also a Sidney Cremer in that world, nothing could be wholly right even for Lord Loveland. While he was thinking how good it would have been—were Fate a better stage manager—to justify himself to Lesley, Lesley sent for him by Uncle Wally.

To her he was still the chauffeur; and the darkey who politely delivered the message, announced that "Young Miss would be obliged to Massah Gordon if he would take her out in the car as quick as possible."

Loveland flung aside "Light," and Uncle Wally let it lie neglected where it fell. Probably he thought that "young Miss" was too impatient for an early motor-spin to care about wasting a moment on a newspaper.

As Loveland looked over the Gloria, making her purr pleasantly in preparation for the run, he tried to decide definitely what to do next.

If he flaunted his public justification in Lesley's face, there would no longer be an excuse to remain a chauffeur, and no doubt the girl would think as much, if he did not propose to leave. Because of her engagement to Sidney Cremer, he could not beg Lesley to let bygones be bygones, and go to England with him as his wife; yet the thought of going back without her, of never seeing her again in this world, impaled Loveland on the sharp prongs of pain.

Since he had known the girl in her own home, it seemed that his first love for her had hardly deserved the name of love, so much more did he love her now. Face to face with the certainty of separation, and her marriage with another man, every hour spent with the loved one became a priceless treasure. He resolved not only to be silent about the article in "New York Light" but to go back to his room, and carefully hide the newspaper.

This he did, delighted to find the big budget lying on the floor where he had left it.

Of course, Lesley or Mrs. Loveland might enquire for "Light" and learn that it had last been seen on his breakfast table. But it would not seem a miracle that a newspaper should be mislaid; and there was a chance that Louisville journals might not have space to "feature" Lord Loveland's affairs. As Lesley had elected to make an early expedition, it was almost certain that she would not have looked at a paper; and if she had skimmed one over, she might easily have missed a paragraph here and there. At worst, Loveland felt sure of this morning with her on the old terms. If she said nothing afterwards, he, too, would simply be mute, until Sidney Cremer's arrival. When Cremer was in the house, he would be glad to go, and glad to prove to Lesley before going that he was all he had once claimed to be.

When the car was ready he drove to the front door, and found Lesley tying on her motor veil, a charming picture set in a rustic frame.

Loveland's spirits rose when he saw that she was alone. "Auntie" in the Limousine was the least obtrusive of chaperons; still, there was joy in having the girl to himself.

"For a wonder I couldn't sleep last night," said Lesley, "and I thought an early spin in the car would clear my brain of cobwebs. I hope you don't mind being routed out at an unearthly hour."

Loveland would have liked to answer that it was unearthly only because it gave him the

companionship of a being divine. But chauffeurs, even gentlemen chauffeurs, do not make such remarks to their employers, still less to the fiancées of their employers. He merely said, therefore, that he was sorry to hear Miss Dearmer had not slept, and was pleased to take her out at any hour. "Uncle Wally told me," he added, "that you'd been writing late last night."

"Not exactly writing," explained Lesley, finishing the chiffon bow under her chin with dainty elaboration. "I was looking over an act of a new play which Sidney has begun. Perhaps that excited me. Anyway, I tossed for hours thinking of a thousand things, when I might better have been dreaming. And then I was waked at seven by a telegram, and couldn't sleep again."

Something in her eyes, gleaming like fairy jewels under an enchanted lake, as they shone through the filmy veil, made Val miserably sure that Cremer had sent the telegram.

But he was becoming (outwardly) quite a well-trained servant, and only under the greatest provocation could he be goaded into asking impertinent questions.

"Shall I drive this morning, Miss Dearmer, or will you?" he enquired, trying to erase all expression from his face.

"Perhaps you'd better, at first. I'm almost too nervous," she said. "Bye and bye, we shall see."

She let him help her into the car, and even the touch of a thick, knitted mitten was electric for Loveland. Then he took the chauffeur's seat by her side, and sent the Gloria spinning down the avenue towards the gate.

"You've heard nothing from your people yet?" asked Lesley, after a few minutes' silence, while they flew along a road smooth as if it had been made for generations.

"Not yet," replied Val. "But I daresay something will be forwarded from Bonnerstown theatre in a day or two. I told you I'd written to the manager there, giving this address, for Bill would have sent on to Bonnerstown anything that came for me to his care in New York."

"Yes, you told me," said Lesley. "But I was wondering if you'd had good news, because——"

"Because of something in your telegram?" Loveland could not resist breaking into the slight pause she made.

"Yes, indirectly. Dear me, Mr. Gordon, don't you think you went round that corner too fast?"

"Did I?" asked Loveland. "I'm sorry. I didn't notice."

"What an alarming confession from one's chauffeur! Oh! and that *chicken!* you nearly ran over it. I believe your nerves must be a little 'jumpy,' too. I think I could drive almost as well as that myself."

"I deserve to be scolded," said Loveland. "I'm afraid I was absent-minded for an instant, though the chicken didn't seem worried about itself."

"Kentucky chickens never do. They're so high-spirited. Take *care* of that baby pig, Mr. Gordon! I think I will drive for awhile after all, if you don't mind."

"Delighted," said Loveland, in a mood to rejoice if the girl upset the car and killed them both, because it would be so much more agreeable to go out of the world with her than to remain in it while she became lost to him as Mrs. Cremer.

He put on the brakes and stopped the car, which panted impatiently by the roadside, while Lesley and he changed places. The way was straight and fairly level, with no sudden risings and fallings, or intricate twistings and turnings; therefore no reason existed why Lesley should not show her newly acquired skill. She began cautiously, but in a few moments put the forty horse-power Gloria on fourth speed, throttling her down to a pace within reason.

"There! Aren't you proud of your pupil?" the girl asked, gaily.

"Very proud," answered Loveland.

"And do you think I should be able to get on without much more teaching from a real expert?"

"Oh, yes. With a decent sort of chauffeur to do your repairs, you can drive the car through country like this, without danger——"

"Unless I get absent-minded."

"Yes, unless you get absent-minded. But why should you be absent-minded, when so soon you'll have the person you care for most sitting beside you, where I sit now? Oh, I ought to beg your pardon for saying such things, Miss Dearmer. But you see, you and I were once friends, not employer and servant, so I forget myself sometimes. And besides, I can't help thinking this morning that you're leading up to saying something which perhaps you find it a little difficult to say. Yet, why should it be difficult for you to tell me if you've heard that Mr. Cremer's coming at once and bringing another chauffeur."

"My telegram didn't say that, but it made me feel that I shan't be able to keep you very long at the Hill Farm," said Lesley.

Gone was the elaborate scheme for staying on at any cost! She wanted him to go. She was

hinting for him to go.

"I can leave whenever you like to get rid of me," returned Val, his tone roughened, made almost brutal by his effort to hide the sharp pain he suffered.

"Oh, don't think I feel like that!" exclaimed Lesley, eagerly—so eagerly that in her excitement she did the very thing she had reproached Loveland for doing. She forgot that a person controlling a powerful motor-car is ill advised to be in earnest about anything except the business in hand.

They were approaching a somewhat abrupt turn in the road at the moment Lesley chose to assure Loveland that she didn't mean to hurt his feelings. Being genuinely sorry for the effect her words produced, she did not realise until too late that the corner would expect her to slow down before turning it. Had she been an experienced driver, the right action would have been mechanical; but as it was, she discovered with a quick rush of blood to her heart that she could not check the speed in time. She tried to make up for her mistake by a feat of accurate steering, but the task was beyond her powers. The big Gloria swung round the curve on two wheels, refused to take the new direction, and bounded gaily off the road, across a ditch and into a meadow.

CHAPTER FORTY

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MOON

The next thing that Loveland knew, he was sitting in a bog, which felt quite soft and comfortable, so comfortable that he at first believed himself to be in bed, waking out of a bad dream. Then with a flash he remembered all that had happened, and scrambled up in a cold sweat of fear for Lesley.

He was dripping with water and mossy mud, but though his limbs felt heavy and he staggered a little, his temples throbbing as if his brain were propelled by a steam engine, he was hardly conscious that his own body still existed. His one thought was of the girl.

A cataract of sparks which showered before his eyes dimmed his sight at first, but in a moment he saw a slight, grey-clad figure lying limply on the ground not far away. As for the motor-car which rested on its side at a little distance, its pleasant purring stilled, Loveland had forgotten all about it.

"Lesley!" he cried, as he ran to her. "Lesley!"

But she neither stirred nor answered.

Down he dropped on both knees beside her, and raised her head upon his arm. Her eyes were closed, and through the chiffon veil he could see the long lashes dark on the pallor of her cheeks.



"Down he dropped on both knees beside her, and raised her head upon his arm"

The ground where she lay was spongy after a day of heavy rain which had soaked through the thick carpet of dead grass, deeply into the earth. The girl's position was easy, giving Loveland the hope that no bones were broken, and there was no stain of blood on the white face or the soft brown hair. But she lay very still; there was no flutter of the eyelashes, no faint gasping for breath.

Sick with fear that she might be dead, Loveland's memory refused the barrier between them. He was conscious only of his love for her, and his passionate remorse for the wish, harboured for a moment—the wish that she might let something happen to the car, and that they two might go out of the world together. There was no torture which he would not have prayed to suffer now, if through it he could even hope to bring her back to life.

"Dearest—precious one—darling!" he called her. "For God's sake wake up. Speak to me—only speak to me. I love you so!"

Instantly she opened her eyes wide, shivering a little in his arms, and looked up at him—half dazedly at first, then smiling as a woman might who has dreamed of a distant lover and wakes to find him near.

"Thank God you're not dead!" he stammered.

"And that—you're not!" she answered faintly. "You—you're not much hurt?"

"Not at all, and if I were it wouldn't matter," Loveland assured her fervently. "If only I hadn't let you drive—or if I hadn't talked to you!—it's all my fault. What shall I do if you're injured?"

"I—I'm all right, and—and rather happy," whispered Lesley. "I don't think anything's the matter at all—except a little shock."

"Let me lift you up for a minute, so that we can make sure whether you are hurt," said Val. "I'll do it so gently—"

"No. I'd rather lie still—just as I am," the girl answered.

"Would you be more comfortable if I laid your head on the ground?"

"No, keep it on your arm, please. I like it there," said Lesley; and Loveland was made so happy by the words and by the sudden revulsion from despair to hope that he could have broken down and sobbed.

"I feel as if I'd been dreaming," she murmured on. "I dreamed that you—that you called me—*your darling*: that you said you loved me."

"Forgive me!" exclaimed Loveland. "I couldn't help it. I was half mad."

"Then it wasn't a dream?"

"No. It wasn't a dream," he confessed. "Even though you think me an impostor, you can't believe me a wholly unredeemed villain, or you wouldn't have taken me into your house—for charity's sake, though it was. So you must know now that you've nothing to fear from my love."

"Is it real love—tell me?" she asked, her head nestling comfortably against his arm.

"It's the realest thing about me—it's grown to be the whole of me," Loveland broke out. "Nothing else matters. That's why I should have had to kill myself if you'd been hurt—or—but I can't speak of it. Thank God, you're alive and not injured. Yes, that's enough for me—it's got to be enough, and I ought to be happy though you're going to belong to another man."

"*You* wouldn't have wanted to marry me, any way," said Lesley.

"I wouldn't have wanted to—when it's the thing I'd give all but one year of my life for—the one year I'd keep to be happy in with you."

"Just a poor little humble story writer—and you would really like to marry It?"

"Don't torture me," said Loveland. "I've had about all I can stand. If I were the impostor you think me—"

"I *don't* think you an impostor," replied Lesley, beginning to speak in quite a natural tone of voice again, though she kept the support of Loveland's arm. "I never said I did. I only asked you once, why I should have more faith in you than others had? But I'd be ready to take you on faith, if you were ready to take me without a fortune."

The blood rushed to Loveland's face, which had been pale and drawn. "Is it true—do you mean it?" he stammered. "*Do* you care for me a little?"

"A great deal," said Lesley. "Too much, I used to think on the ship; but I don't think so now, because you're different. It's the real you I loved all the time. The miracle's happened, you know."

I'm seeing the other side of the moon. But wouldn't it be doing you an injury to marry you, when you and your family counted on a great heiress?"

"It was the other *Me*, who hadn't the sense to see what a beastly, caddish thing it would be to marry a girl just because she was rich—a girl I didn't love," Val hurried on. "Oh, Lesley, you're not playing with me, are you? I couldn't marry any other woman but you."

"What about the old family home that's tumbling to ruin?"

"It will have to tumble."

"And your family?"

"There's only my mother, and what she wants most is my happiness. My love for you has somehow shown me how to appreciate her more. But, Lesley—what about Sidney Cremer? Do you care enough for me—a man you say you're 'taking on faith'—to give up all Cremer's money and to throw him over for my sake?"

"I can't throw him over."

"Then how can we be married?"

"And I can't give up his money," she added.

"Lesley! Have you raised me up only to let me fall deeper into the pit than ever?"

"We both fell into the pit together, didn't we?" she said, laughing a little. "If you go deeper, I'll go deeper, too, for we're going to stand or fall together now."

"Then, what do you mean?" asked Val. "You'll have to send one of us away—me or Sidney Cremer."

"Let me sit up, and we'll talk it over," said Lesley, with a quaint cheerfulness and matter-of-factness that utterly bewildered Loveland. "I feel so well and so happy now, that I believe I can find my way out of any entanglement so long as we go hand in hand." And sitting on the wet grass in her thick fur coat she twisted herself so lithely about that there could no longer be any fear of obscure injuries.

Val, resting on one knee, took the little grey mitten that she held out to him, and pressed the hand in it. But there was bitterness in his voice as he answered. "This is an entanglement that you'll find no way out of. You can't keep us both."

"You don't trust me," Lesley reproached him. "Just wait before deciding to give me up, until we've thoroughly thrashed things out, beginning at the beginning, and going right on to the end."

"I shan't decide to give you up; nothing can make me do that now," Loveland said. "It's Cremer who'll have to go to the wall."

Lesley laughed. "Like his motor. Poor, *poor* car—I'm sorry for it, but it hasn't sacrificed itself in vain. I was beginning to wonder how on earth to bring all this about. That was what kept me awake last night, if I'm to tell the whole truth. It *had* to come some way, and it had to come soon. Well, Sidney's motor-car has solved the difficulty, and Sidney will be glad, for my happiness is the same to him as his own. And now I've gone so far, I may as well confess that from the very minute I saw you play 'Lord Bob,' in that dingy little hall at Ashville, I hoped—oh, but hoped more than *anything*, that you would ask me to marry you. Please, please, don't be shocked, but I invited you to come here just for that."

Loveland was utterly at sea, or would have been if her hand had not lain in his, and if she had not begged him to wait and trust her.

"Yet, you were engaged to Sidney Cremer," he said, half to himself.

"I was bound to Sidney just as I am now, and just as I have been for the last three years. And I wasn't tired of him then, not a bit, and I'm not, even at this minute. But I love *you*—the Real You."

"Darling!" exclaimed Loveland. Yet he marvelled at her. This was a phase of the girl's character—her true and noble character—which he was at a loss to understand.

"You were very cold to me that night at Ashville," he ventured to say.

"I was trying you. I wasn't quite sure, you see, which side of the moon I was looking at; and if after all it was only the same old side, I didn't want to let myself be dazzled by it, as I couldn't help being at first. Oh, but don't misunderstand me! It wasn't the reflected light—the light of a high position—that had dazzled me. That never mattered. It was a different light—a light that never shone on land or sea, but shines just once, they say, in every woman's life. That means what I said before: that I was in love with you on the boat, even when I laughed at your talk of love. I felt more like crying than laughing, though, because the sort of love you gave me in return for mine wasn't worth my having. I was too good for it."

"Heaven knows you were," Val admitted, humbly.

"But I'm not too good—no, not good enough, for what you give me now; and that's why I'm so frightfully happy, and delighted that Sidney's motor jumped over conventionalities instead of my

having to take the leap myself. Instead, I just leaped with the car, and you leaped, too—and everything is going to be Heavenly for all the rest of our lives."

"I don't quite see how, if you're not tired of Cremer," said Loveland.

"Don't be jealous of Sidney any more; I liked making you a little jealous of him at first—after I saw how you felt. It was fun for me—and I thought it was good for you. But now it's different. I'm sure—*sure*—about the other side of the moon, and I want you to be as happy as I am. Oh, don't speak yet! I must go on a little further. You know, I told you I had a telegram this morning?"

"Yes—yes."

"Well, you thought it was from Sidney Cremer, and I didn't contradict. Lots of things you've thought lately I let you go on thinking, without contradicting. The telegram was from little Fanny Milton—about you."

"About me?"

"She knew from a journalist who is a friend of hers that you'd come to this part of the country with a theatrical troupe, and they'd found out that the actors were playing pieces of Sidney Cremer's at Ashville. They talked it over together—Fanny and this Mr. Kidd. He wanted to know for his paper's sake where you'd disappeared to when the company broke up. Last evening he suggested that she should telegraph to me. They both thought I might have heard about you. So that's why I felt that you wouldn't be stopping on as my chauffeur very long."

"Did Miss Milton say in the telegram that New York had discovered its mistake about me?"

"No, she didn't say that, though it was a long telegram. I expect she thought I would have seen the newspapers. Well, I haven't; but I can put two and two together quite nicely, and I was sure that you'd come into your own again with the great American public—perhaps partly through Fanny Milton's Mr. Kidd. I'd be willing to wager all the profits of Sidney Cremer's next play or novel—if I had them—that you can now go back, if you like, and get without any difficulty the heiress you came across the water for."

"I'm sick of the very word heiress!" protested Loveland, with complete sincerity.

"That's the new You. And what a very new You it is, when one comes to think of it! Only a few weeks old. But it's the only real one. The other was a shell which has broken."

"You broke it," said Val.

"I cracked it a little, maybe, on the boat; but it took a big hammer to smash it, and now I've swept all the fragments away. There's just the real you and the real me in the world—with the wonderful light from the other side of the moon shining on us two—and Sidney Cremer."

"Oh, Sidney Cremer!" cried Loveland. "He still stands between us."

"No, he doesn't. If you love me you'll have to love Sidney, too, because Sidney Cremer and I are one, and his money is mine; because I earn it, and *don't* I enjoy it, too! Haven't I enjoyed it for three whole years, since all of a sudden from being a poor girl, dependent on Aunt Barbara, I waked up to find myself a rich one—oh, not rich in your meaning of the word, not rich enough to line castle walls with gold and diamonds, but rich enough to do nice little things for an old Kentucky farm-house, and perhaps even to help restore ancient British strongholds if the lord of them and of my heart will give me so much happiness.

"You—you are Sidney Cremer?" Loveland could only stammer the words stupidly.

"Yes. Are you so surprised that I'm clever enough to make a success with my brain and my pen? I often wondered when you'd begin to suspect—but you never did. And I was wondering, too, whether Sidney Cremer would have to propose to you in the end. It's been great fun keeping my secret from the world, never letting anyone know the real truth except Auntie and the Ashville cousins—though Fanny Milton and lots of other acquaintances thought I was a *friend* of Sidney Cremer's—perhaps even a poor relation of his. But the most fun of all has been keeping the secret from you till the time was ripe to tell. Do you remember saying the other day, '*Sidney Cremer is everything?*' I told you I'd remind you of that some time, and ask if you could say it again. Can you now?"

"Sidney Cremer is everything," repeated Loveland. Whereupon Lesley gave one of her little soft, cooing sighs, and let him take her into his arms.

They were both very muddy and mossy, and rather bruised and shaken, if they had not been too deeply absorbed in the feelings of their hearts to think of the feelings of their bodies. And perhaps a boggy field with no shelter save a motor-car lying rakishly on one side, was a queer place for an engagement between a young English Marquis and a celebrated American novelist-playwright. But for Lesley and Loveland it was perfect. Sidney Cremer's vivid fancy had never created a more enchanting scene for the love-making of hero and heroine. And though, if there had been an audience, it would have seen the stage lit up only with pale rays of wintry sunshine, for the girl and the man it was illumined with ineffable light from the other side of the moon.

THE END

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